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MEXICO.

CHAPTER I.

THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA—EARLY LIFE OF CORTES—HE SAILS TO THE WEST INDIES—GOES TO CUBA—IS SENT ON AN EXPEDITION BY VELASQUEZ—WITH DIRECTIONS WHAT TO DO—STORY OF AGUILAR.

It was about three hundred years ago, when Charles V. was Emperor of Spain, that the events of which I am now about to tell you happened. A little before this time, the wisest, as well as the most ignorant men of Spain, and of all Europe, thought that those waves of the Atlantic Ocean, that rolled upon the shores of Europe on the western side, were the

boundary of the world, and that if men sailed far that way, in ships, they might come to some dark unknown space and be lost.

The wide ocean, that divides Europe from America, was unknown. The land of America, which stretches so far to the north and south, the West Indian, and other islands near its coasts, are called the New World. There it was, with its lofty chains of mountains, its broad rivers, and lakes, and shady forests, and rich fruits, and flowers, when God made the world, and "saw every thing that He had made, and behold it was very good," yet it was quite unknown to Europeans till more than five thousand years after the Creation. Then a thoughtful and brave man, who had become much wiser, by study and reflection, than the rest of

his countrymen, felt certain that there must be land to be met with far across those western waves. It was thought a most foolish adventure when, at last, Columbus, the Genoese, set sail in search of the unknown land. It must end, men thought, in disappointment. It might end in destruction. Yet, though some laughed at, and some were shocked by the boldness of Columbus, he sailed on, and at last discovered the New World. I cannot now stop to tell you of his courage, and his many difficulties, and his success at last. This New World had been found at the time of which I speak, but its shape was not known. Its bays, and creeks, and straits, and that deep gulf, at the south of North America, the Gulf of Mexico, and the land near it, called Mexico, had never yet been visited.

When once Columbus had been to America, those who would have laughed at him as a madman, grew bold enough to think they should like to go too. Many now were eager to venture across the ocean, and to see if they could not learn more of that new land than he had been able to tell. Though Columbus was a native of Genoa, Spain was the country from which he had sailed, and it was Spain that first heard the news of his discoveries. It was quickly spread abroad that there was gold in abundance in the New World. Some Spaniards had but a poor living at home: they thought that some of this gold might fall to their share if they crossed the seas. Some liked nothing so well as new adventures: they thought they might get a name for bravery. Some would go any where that

their Sovereign bid them. So, what with loyalty, and the love of adventure, and the love of gold, it was easy to man ships now for a voyage to the west.

Among those who wished to go from the spirit of adventure (because he loved whatever was dangerous and difficult), was a very young man named Hernando Cortes. His parents had wished him to follow the quiet life of a lawyer, and had taken care that he should be trained in such learning as was needful for that profession. But the wonders and treasures of the New World were talked of even in the little town of Medellin, in Estremadura, where Hernando lived with his parents, and the youths at the College of Salamanca, where he was sent to study, were full of the same subject.

To grow rich, without working hard,

was the bright prospect in the eyes of some; but to be like the knight errant, and shrink from no brave adventure, was the thing that Hernando longed for. Hernando had been idle as a boy. He was full of frolicsome and mischievous pranks, now that he had passed boyhood. It seemed that he would never grow grave and steady, as became a young lawyer. He often entreated his parents that they would let him seek his fortune in the New World, and they, finding him so troublesome and difficult to manage, at length consented. He was but nineteen years old when he obtained leave to go, and it was a sore disappointment to him that he was lying sick upon his bed when the splendid armament of Nicolas de Ovando left the shores of Spain. In one of his mad frolics he had

fallen, and hurt himself so much that now he could not move. The sickness did not last very long, nor did it cure him of his desire to leave his home and country. Another squadron was soon fitted out, and ready to go towards the west. The vessels were fewer, and not so well appointed as the last, and in one of them young Cortes sailed.

The little squadron (or company of vessels) kept near together at first, but towards the end of the voyage the Captain of the ship in which Cortes had embarked determined to separate from the rest, that he might reach the West Indian islands first, and then he thought "I will land before my companions in those rich islands, and my cargo will be sold at a better rate than if we were all selling our goods at the same time."

So for the love of getting rich this mean-spirited man separated from his friends, and took (as he thought) a more direct course to finish his voyage quickly. But a tempest rose, and he was driven quite another way, and, after all, arrived last, instead of first, with tattered sails, and a forlorn appearance altogether.

All his companions had sold their various cargoes. His gains were therefore smaller than theirs, and thus he met with a just punishment for his dishonest behaviour. Cortes saw that in Hispaniola, where he first landed, there were Spanish hidalgos (as the nobles were called) living at their ease, but he, a poor adventurer, had nothing at all. He had not come from Spain to settle down to a life of industry, and he waited impatiently for some opportunity of showing his courage.

He had not to wait very long, for Diego Velasquez, the lieutenant of that great armament under Ovando, which had sailed when Cortes was sick and ill, was sent to conquer the island of Cuba, and to be its governor. Young Hernando was delighted to go with him. Now he thought he should be able to shew his bravery. But there was no bravery in subduing the timid Indians of Cuba.

The people of that island, and of all the islands near and round about it, were a gentle race, they had a dark and swarthy skin quite unlike the European. They lived indolently under their sunny skies, for the fruits of the earth grew so readily in those rich lands, and their wants were so few, that there was no need to labour much, and the warmth disposed them to quiet.

They made but little resistance to the strong white men, who compelled them to submit, and then behaved with great cruelty to them. It was a cruel thing to make people, who had been brought up so indolently, work hard, but many of the Spanish officers had hearts as hard as their steel morions. When Velasquez, with the help of his men, had conquered the Indians of Cuba, and was Governor of the island, he behaved so haughtily that he was disliked by his officers.

Cortes had begun life by not submitting to his parents, now he would not submit to his governor, and as he was the boldest among the officers of Velasquez, he was chosen by them to carry a complaint of the new governor back to Hispaniola. He made his escape in one of the vessels by night, but Velasquez found out what

was going on, in time to have him pursued, and he was brought back and very roughly treated by the angry lord of Cuba. He was put in irons and imprisoned for a time, but at last he was reconciled to him so far as to let him go free. And now, Hernando Cortes, having nothing better to do, set to work to cultivate that part of the island of Cuba which had been given him for his share, and as there were rich gold mines in Cuba, as well as plenty of the fruits of the earth, he soon became a wealthy man. "God knows," said Las Casas, a good Bishop who befriended the Indians, "at what cost of Indian lives this was obtained." Things had been going on in this quiet way for some years, when one day a vessel arrived in one of the ports in Cuba, in which was Alvarado, a Spanish

cavalier. He had been sailing about in search of new land, with some vessels under the command of a countryman, named Grivaljo. Grivaljo was now missing, and Alvarado wished to stir up his countrymen in Cuba to go in search of him. All he had to say of the land that lay along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, excited among them great curiosity to see it. Velasquez could not but know that his troublesome officer Cortes was brave, and that he would think no duty too perilous, and he therefore appointed him to go forth to these unknown parts, and gave him instructions how to act. He might have felt rather glad to get rid of an officer who had not always been obedient, and who had encouraged others in insubordination, yet after he had appointed him to be Captain-general of the fleet, he

was half sorry that he had not chosen some one else.

Velasquez thought, "perhaps Cortes, when once he is gone, will no longer submit to my orders; perhaps he will become a governor himself." This fear was confirmed by a circumstance which happened one day.

A jester (one of those half mad fellows that people were wont to keep near them in old times to make sport, and who sometimes spoke the truth boldly) called out loudly one day, as Velasquez passed him leaning on the arm of Cortes. "Have a care, Master Velasquez, or we shall have to go a hunting some day after this same captain of ours!"

"Do you hear what the rogue says?" said the Governor, to his companion.

"Do not heed him," said Cortes, "he

is a saucy knave, and deserves a good whipping." But the jester had spoken truth, and Velasquez heard and remembered; and thought within himself how he could appoint another officer in the place of Cortes. Neither did Cortes forget the jester's speech.

He had been beyond measure delighted to get the command of several ships. He was in the greatest haste to be gone. He disposed of all the property he had in Cuba, and spent his money in buying such military stores and provisions as he knew would be necessary where he was going; and, hearing only a hint that some one else might be appointed in his place, he set sail secretly, before the Governor suspected that he could be in readiness to go.

He was now Captain General of six ships and three hundred men.

The ships were not so well stored as they would have been if he could have spent more time in the outfit, and had not hurried off, fearing to be displaced in the command.

The business on which Cortes was sent, was to examine the coast of the Gulf of Mexico; to see what kind of people lived on its shores; to change some of the productions of Spain (which he took with him) for more valuable commodities if they were to be had.

He was to invite the people, whoever they might be, to have the Emperor of Spain for their ruler, and to tell them that the best way of showing that they intended to submit to him, would be to send him gold, and silver, and precious stones.

Velasquez had given these directions

to Cortes, and they were all written out. They ended with one more important than all. It was, "Take the most anxious care to omit nothing that will redound to the glory of God." This was the very best direction that could be given. It seemed like the words of the Bible itself, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Can you think what the Spaniards would have done in the New World, if they had really gone there on purpose to do all to the glory of God?

I can show you how they might have honoured God, by the story of a Spanish priest, who was shipwrecked and thrown upon the coast of Yucatan some years before Cortes received his instructions. Aguilar (the Spanish priest) swam on shore all alone. He fell into the hands

of an idolatrous Indian Chief who at first treated him very harshly.

All his ill usage Aguilar bore with the greatest patience, and instead of returning it with angry words and looks, he would see what kind things he could do in return for the ill-behaviour of the Indians, for they all followed the example of their Chief in scorning the good man. He *would* love them, and *would* do acts of love for them. This was because he remembered the words of his Master and Saviour Jesus Christ, who said, "Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you."

Soon the Indian Chief began to treat him more kindly; and, to make up for his former harshness, he offered him a wife; but the priest had long ago vowed not to marry, and he told the Indian he should

be doing wrong to break his vow, and that therefore he would not have a wife.

The Chief thought he had a strange kind of being to do with, one who bore unkindness without a murmur, and would not accept a kindness when he thought it wrong to do so. It seemed that the white man must belong to a better race of people than he had ever known. He now began to treat him with respect and favour; and when, many years after, Cortes landed in Yucatan, he found this countryman of his, the humble Spanish priest, was consulted by all the Indians in that part in every important affair, and was raised to be next in honour to the Chief himself. He had done all to the glory of God as a Christian should, and God had been with him and prospered him. But this was not what Velasquez of Cuba meant

when he wrote at the end of his directions to Cortes, "Do all to the glory of God." He did not mean, "Go and show the Heathens what a Christian life is, and teach them of the blood shed on the Cross for sin, and then show them that you are ready to suffer any scorn or pain for the love of your dear Lord." He meant, "Go, and first get riches in the New World, then show the Indians the Cross and tell them what the white man's religion is; and if they refuse to give up their idols, then do battle with them, trample down those who resist you with the hoofs of your war-horses—overthrow their temples—break down their images—and make the idolators slaves in the land where they have been masters. This is what I have done for the glory of God in Cuba."

The Spanish Cavaliers who assembled under Cortes, as soon as they knew he was setting out on adventures, all believed they were doing God service in fighting for their religion. None of them had learnt that he who rules his own spirit, is greater than he who takes a city. Pedro de Alvarado—Cristoval de Olid—Alonso de Avila—Velasquez de Leon—Gonzalo de Sandoval, were their names.

They were men who had practised all hardy exercises from their youth, who had played at fighting when boys, and who had practised mock fights or tournaments when men. They would go fully armed day after day, and sleep with their armour beside them at night, ready to start up at a moment's notice when their services were required.

They managed their horses with the

greatest skill. Their own bodies were strong to endure, and the armour in which they were cased made them almost invincible. Their hearts were now stirred with a high sense of duty as they gathered together beneath the banner of Cortes, for as its heavy folds of black velvet spread slowly out in the air, a red cross was seen embroidered on it, and underneath these words, "Friends, let us follow the Cross; and under this sign if we have faith we shall conquer."

CHAPTER II.

CORTES LANDS AT VERA CRUZ—DONA MARINA—THE RESOLUTION OF CORTES—HE SINKS HIS OWN FLEET—STILLS THE MURMURS OF HIS ARMY.

At the port of Vera Cruz (on the 21st day of May, 1519) the fleet of Cortes came to anchor. More than three months had passed since they left Cuba, and the little army had not been idle. They had been to Yucatan and released Aguilar the Spanish priest (whose story you read in the last chapter) and brought him away with them to act as interpreter; for Aguilar could now speak the Mexican language as well as his own Spanish, and was therefore likely to be very useful in

making Cortes understand the messages of the Indians, and in telling *them* what Cortes meant, when he spoke what was an unknown tongue to them. And the army had fought a battle at Tabasco, had planted the Cross of Christ on a heathen temple there, and had made the Indians say that they would submit to the Emperor of Spain. And now the sails of the small squadron of adventurers were flapping in the hot wind, in the port of Vera Cruz, and some canoes of the natives were rocking on the waves beside them. And as the Spaniards strained their eyes to see what kind of land lay before them, they looked upon red sand-hills, bare and burning in the hot sun. Towering in the distance, was a most majestic mountain, which they had long seen as they sailed that way. It was the Star Mountain, or

Peak of Orizaba. Its upper part was covered with dazzling snow, and it had got its name of Star Mountain from the burning volcanic flames that lighted up its summit. As the rough soldiers hurried on shore out of the different vessels, they made way respectfully for a person whose plain dark dress was very unlike their military attire, and whose step was slow and dignified. This man was a priest, who advised Cortes in all things, and the Captain-General loved and reverenced Father Olmedo, though he did not always follow his advice.

There stepped on shore also, a slight young Indian girl, who looked half frightened to be among so many armed men; but when she met the eye of Cortes, all her fear was gone. He was the commander of these strange beings. They

instantly obeyed his lightest word, and the speech he had made to her, though she could not understand one syllable, gave her sure confidence that he would protect her. Dona Marina was a slave from Tabasco. The Chief sent a present to Cortes after his victory there, and this slave was part of the present. She had not always been a slave; she was the daughter of a rich Indian Noble, who died when she was quite a child, and all his riches should have been hers. But her mother married another man, and had a boy, whom she loved far better than her first child. She wished to get all Marina's wealth for her son.

Merchants travelled through that country to sell rich stuffs, and to buy or sell slaves. This cruel mother sold her young daughter to them. Then she

was bought with other slaves by the Chief of Tabasco, and given by him as part of the present he made to Cortes.

Marina remained with Cortes all the time he was in Mexico, and she became more useful to him as an interpreter than Aguilar.

The people about Vera Cruz welcomed the Spaniards kindly. They collected a number of wooden stakes, drove them firmly into the sand, and spread matting from one to another, so as to make an awning that the army might be sheltered from the great heat of the sun; and they willingly brought out maize cakes or bread, such as they ate themselves, and fruits ripened in their hot sun, which were better than the fruits of Spain. Cortes did not mean to rest long under the shade the friendly Indians had made.

SUPERIOR INDIANS IN THEIR HOLIDAY DRESS.

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He had already learnt that there were many tribes of Indians along the coast of Mexico, that they had cities, and temples, and carried on useful arts. It was told that there was a large empire far inland among the mountains, governed by a tyrant King, whose name was Montezuma—that thousands and tens of thousands trembled at his name, for he was served rather from fear than love.

His subjects who lived round about him would not dare to resist his will, but the tribes near the coasts and some others, were not all subject to him. Some he had not been able to conquer, and those whom he had conquered were beginning to think that they might be better off in submitting to the white men than to Montezuma.

The tribe of Totanacs had already sent

a message to Cortes with a present, to tell him that they would serve him; would send some of their fighting men to the wars with him if he wished it; and would always be his friends. It now came into the mind of Cortes, that though he had so small an army of his own, he might win the whole Mexican Empire for the Crown of Spain. He determined he would do it. He looked at his own hardy warriors, and saw how strong they were in their coats of mail, compared with the Indians in their cotton quilted fighting dress.

A horse was an animal which had never been seen in this part of the New World, and an armed Spaniard seated on his war-horse was a terrible sight to the boldest Indian. Then the sound of artillery had never been heard before in Mexico, and

the bellowing cannon sounded like the rumbling of the Volcanic mountains, which always terrified the Indian, for he thought it was the wrath of an angry spirit. In the battle of Tabasco, Cortes had seen that his few followers could gain the victory, though thousands of Tabascans came against them. Why should they not do the same every where, and stir up more tribes as they went along to revolt from Montezuma?

Cortes resolved in his own mind never again to be under the power of his old governor, Velasquez, but to fight for the Emperor of Spain alone, and he would do no lighter service for his Emperor than to win the whole of Mexico for him. He was obliged to hide his thoughts for the present in his own mind; there were none of his cavaliers to whom he could

tell them ; brave as they were and daring, he feared that not one among them would think his mad scheme possible. They might be so disheartened at the thought of the difficulties into which he meant to lead them, as to desert him, and sail away in some of the ships that were now in the harbour of Vera Cruz. He soon made up his mind what should be done. He would destroy the fleet, so that they could not sail back again to Cuba, and then when all hope of escape was cut off, he would so talk of the glory and riches to be won by following him to Mexico, that not one among them should be able to refuse. He desired the pilots to report that some of their vessels were so much eaten by insects, and shattered by the stormy winds, that they were not sea-worthy.

All the cordage, and iron, and stores, were to be brought on shore to Vera Cruz, and then, one by one, the vessels themselves were to be sunk. The pilots and seamen must have wondered what their Commander meant by destroying ships that were not really so bad as to be useless, but they knew it was their business to obey without asking questions, and they did so.

All was done quickly, and by night, for Cortes had already discovered the intention of a few among his soldiers to man one ship and sail away, and he therefore hastened the mariners in their work. The morning light showed but one ship in the harbour, and when the news went abroad of what had been done, the army was surprised and angry. When the Indians found that the great

"Water-houses" had been all destroyed, might they not rise in great numbers and overpower them; or they might refuse to give the food and fruits they had before brought so freely. Whatever sufferings had to be borne, there was now no hope of escaping by sea. They had expected to return to Cuba after a few more months, with riches easily won, and now they were cut off from their home and country, and friends, perhaps for ever.

They had not time to talk much over their injuries, and to stir one another up to greater indignation against their General, for Cortes stood before them with his commanding look and manner. He was not afraid to put himself in their power; he knew he was beloved, but he had not come to remind them of the love they professed to *him*; he knew how

readily they were moved by the mention of religion, and pointing to a large wooden cross that was planted in the sands near, he asked if they would not brave death to plant the cross on all the Heathen temples; if they were not ready to win Heaven by slaying the Infidels.

He told them of the honour of adding lands to the dominion of Spain, and of the gold and precious stones they would surely meet with if they were not afraid to venture for them.

It was partly what he said, but it was more the sound of his voice, and his way of speaking to them, that stilled their murmurs at once, and they all declared, as they had done before in Cuba, that they were ready to live and die with their brave Captain.

The one vessel which Cortes had pre-

served he put under the command of Alonso de Puertocarrero, and sent him with a letter to his Emperor, Charles V. of Spain, begging that he might be no longer subject to the will of Velasquez, but receive his orders direct from his rightful Sovereign; and then, having secured the hearty good will of all his officers and soldiers, he prepared to march to Mexico, and to see this terrible Montezuma, at whose name so many thousands trembled.

CHAPTER III.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LAND OF ANAHUAC—VARIOUS RACES—THE FOUNDATION OF THE CITY OF MEXICO—FLOATING GARDENS—TRIBES OF THE TABLE LANDS—TLASCALANS.

When Cortes made up his mind to win Mexico for Spain, he did not half know what the Empire of Mexico was. No one who had seen only the coasts of the Gulf, could have imagined the wonders and beauties of the country inland. On and round about the coasts, on the sloping land near the sea, both on the side of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, was the burning climate of the tropics, where fruits and flowers in a rich variety grew luxuri-

antly, and indolent races of men lived. To go inland, a traveller would have to climb a steep ascent till he came to broad tracts of country, as high above the level of the sea as some of the Mountains of Europe, and here the air was temperate and the people much more hardy. These high lands were called table-lands, and there rose on them, and round about them on every side, majestic mountains, such as no European had seen before, fringed round their bases with dark pine forests, and many of them with snowy tops like the Star Mountain, or Peak of Orizaba.

These mountains shut off one tract of table-land from another, and in particular they made a dark frame round the loveliest and most fertile part of these high lands; that portion called the Valley of Mexico, where Montezuma held his court,

and where a race of men called the Aztecs lived, a people as different from the Indians of Cuba, as the savage New Zealanders from the soft, indolent, and child-like tribes of the South Sea Islands.

It was in the year 1325, about two hundred years before Cortes landed in America, that the Aztecs had migrated from some other part of the continent, very far north (as it was supposed), to take possession of the lovely valley of Mexico. The valley was of an oval form, sixty miles long, and thirty-five broad. There were five large lakes in it; the largest was the lake of Tezcuco, on which the chief city of the Aztecs afterwards stood. In 1325, there was no city on the lake of Tezcuco, but there were cities, and towns, and villages in other parts of the valley, where other races more civilised

than the Aztecs had lived before they came there.

One race, in particular, called the Toltecs, are told of as having built their houses, and palaces, and temples, with much beauty and grandeur. The ruins of Pula, their chief city, might be seen in the time of Cortes, at the northern end of the Mexican valley.

The word Toltec was said to signify architect. Learned men, who like to look into the past, and to see how far they can trace back the inhabitants of different nations to that time when it pleased God to spread the various races over the face of the whole earth, would be glad to know who these Toltecs were, and what was their first history, but very little is known about them with any certainty. The Aztecs told old stories of how it was

in the valley before they came there, but these stories or traditions were repeated from one to another through so many years, that it is very likely much was forgotten, and where the story-teller could not remember what he had to tell, he may often have filled up with some invention of his own. The ruins of Tula served to show the truth of parts of the tradition, for there lay the remains of the buildings of old times, and they were not so desolate, but that they showed how well the Toltecs had designed and built them.

Gradually the tribes of Toltecs died away. War, and pestilence, and famine, destroyed many (as was said), and some migrated to other parts. Other races succeeded them, and then the strength of the Aztecs prevailed to rule over all that

remained, and to establish themselves as masters of the valley of Mexico. They did not win the land all at once for their own. Sometimes the people they attacked prevailed against *them*, and it was not, until after many fierce struggles, that they at length gained the mastery. The Aztecs chose a shallow, swampy part of the lake of Tezcuco, on which to build their first town.

There is a story told, that a prickly pear-tree grew out of the crevice of a rock, which rose above the waters of the lake in this swampy part. As the Aztecs were looking about for a good and safe place on which they might build a town for themselves, they saw a noble eagle, which had sailed down from the neighbouring mountain-tops, and had lighted on the prickly pear. The royal bird had

a serpent in its talons, and as the Aztec chief looked on it and saw its feathers ruffled out in triumph over its prize, he thought he should, in the end, resemble that eagle, and be lord over the weaker races of the valley. It is said, that it was by this sight that the Aztecs were determined to build their city on the lake, having been assured by an oracle that such an omen as they had seen was sent expressly to direct them. If they had seen no eagle, and heard no oracle, it is likely that they would have chosen this place, for no situation could be better for people surrounded by enemies, as they were. The waters rose all round it, and made a secure defence. So they set to work at once, drove stout beams of timber into the swamp, and then raised their dwellings above them. Some of

these were mud-walled huts, and some cottages, made of a light frame-work of wood, and thatched, and filled in at the sides with reeds and rushes. This small beginning, in after years, increased, until it became the capital of the empire of Mexico, a large city, containing many thousand inhabitants, with stately palaces and temples.

Even then the waters of the lake came up all round it, and one part of the city was much divided from another by canals. These had to be crossed in many places by draw-bridges. The canoes of the Indians could pass to and fro in the streets of the city.

One city in Europe, called Venice, is built in somewhat a similar way, and when the Europeans first saw Mexico, they called it the "Venice of the Aztecs."

The little town of mud huts and bamboo cottages that the Aztecs first built, they named Tenochtitlan. This word means, a "cactus on a stone." The prickly pear was a sort of cactus, and it was in remembrance of the tree that had grown there, on which the eagle lighted, that it was so named. The name of Mexico, which it afterwards bore, was from Mexitli, a war-god.

After the Aztecs had built their town, and found how safe it was, being well defended by the waters all round it, they were rather badly off for food. Certainly, there was abundance of fish from the lake, but fish alone, without bread or vegetables, was not very fit to live upon. They could not venture out into the rich lands of the valley, where corn would have grown abundantly under the hot

sun of this temperate climate. If they had sown maize there, their enemies would have reaped it while they were safe in their island home. They thought of a very ingenious plan of having fields of corn, and gardens of flowers, as well protected from the attacks of enemies as their town upon the lake. There were water-plants growing round the borders of all the lakes, which had tough and fibrous roots. These they collected in great numbers, and bound together long sticks and the branches of trees with them, until they had made large frames that would bear a heavy weight.

They placed their frames upon the waters, and from the bottom of the lake, where the water was shallow, they took up a large quantity of mud. This they heaped on the frames, until a deep soil

was made, in which they could sow corn and plant vegetables. All that they planted grew and flourished well, having water in abundance at the roots, and a warm sun above; and as time went on, when these people were more at leisure, after they had become masters of the land, they made flower-gardens in the same way as they had made their corn fields and vegetable grounds. Nothing could be prettier than these floating islands, quietly rocked by the waves, under the summer sun; the corn green or golden; and the bright flowers in luxuriant abundance, trailing their many coloured blossoms in wreaths to the water's edge.

Some of the islands were large and strong enough to bear the weight of a little shed, where a man might be sheltered

who tended the fruits or flowers. The smaller ones were towed along fastened to a canoe, which an Indian rowed. (The general name of Indian was given to all the old inhabitants of America.)

War went on between the different tribes in the valley, till the Tapanecs gained a victory over the Tezcucans. Then the Aztecs took part with the Tezcucans, and so completely conquered the Tapanecs, that they gave no more trouble. The Tezcucans, grateful for the help they had received from the Aztecs, became friendly with them, and joined them and a smaller tribe, in agreeing to live at peace.

The Chiefs of these three tribes were at first nearly equal, but in the course of time the Aztecs gained the greatest power, and the lords of Tezcuco and Tlapocan

were like great feudal chiefs, while the Prince of the Aztecs was called Emperor of the whole valley.

There was something very different in the character of the Aztecs and the Tezcucans; the former were fierce and cruel, the latter of a much milder nature. When once all were thoroughly at peace, there was time to think of increasing the size of the chief cities, and of cultivating the land. The floating gardens, and vegetable grounds, and corn-fields upon the Lake of Tezcuco, were no longer the only spots where such productions could be safe. All the sloping lands of the hill sides, and level plains between, were turned into orchards and corn-fields. Shady woods already grew on them; fine oaks, and cypresses, the pepper tree, with its red berries, and bright leaves, and

many other noble trees, grew abundantly every where, and fringed the lakes, dipping their branches, heavy with foliage, into the waters, and then stretched away over all the irregular land which lay between the high barrier of mountains.

Still the Aztecs kept up, and tended their floating islands; for when their chief city increased, and was filled with inhabitants, the fruits and flowers that grew upon them were sure of a sale in Mexico, and were easily rowed along to the borders of the town.

The Aztecs could not give up war altogether, for it was an enjoyment to their cruel nature, and they still trained multitudes to arms, and sent them abroad over the large tracts beyond that ridge of mountains which shut in their valley. Thus by degrees they succeeded in ruling

over many tribes of Anahuac, (the name given to the land between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean.)

When the Aztecs wished to conquer a new tribe, they first sent ambassadors, or messengers, to describe how strong the Emperor of the valley was, and to ask if the chief of the tribe would consent to become his subject,—if he would send him every year tribute, that is, presents of the best things his land produced, and a certain number of people to serve in the wars. When the chief of a tribe considered that, if a powerful army was brought into his little kingdom, his subjects would be killed or made slaves, and after all be compelled to give up their liberty—he would agree to all the Ambassador demanded, and thus the Aztecs got a larger dominion without much

trouble. But some tribes were strong enough to resist—they sent a message back to say that they had fighting men to bring against the armies of Mexico, and that they would never give up their freedom, unless they were forced to submit.

Among those who always resisted were the Tlascalans, and a smaller tribe, the Otomies, who joined with them. The district of Tlascala to the south of the valley of Mexico was very mountainous. There were fertile plains between the mountains, and from these it gained the name of Tlascala, or "land of bread."

This land had a wall of mountains round it on three sides, but on the east there was no defence. There was a long open space, through which the armies of the Aztecs might enter easily.

To keep themselves safe on this side

ANCIENT WARRIORS.

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the Tlascalans set to work to make a strong wall of blocks of stone, fitted together without cement, nine feet high, and twenty feet thick.

There was a parapet along its outer edge, behind which soldiers might be placed, who could shower down stones or darts on any enemy, who should be bold enough to come near.

About the centre the entrance passage was ingeniously contrived. Here one portion of the wall overlapped the other, leaving a narrow way between—so narrow that only a few could pass in at a time, and these few might easily be stoned, and beaten down by the soldiers on the inner wall. The Aztecs grew weary at length of attacking this hardy race of mountaineers, who, like the Swiss, did all they could to live in freedom among their

native hills;—but there was always a deadly enmity between the two nations, as Cortes found, when he became better informed about the history of Anahuac.

CHAPTER IV.

THE IDOLATRY OF THE LAND—THE TEZCUCAN IDOLATRY MILDER THAN THE AZTEC STORY OF A TEZCUCAN PRINCE.

The tribes of the Mexican valley, and all the nations of Anahuac, were idolaters, yet all professed to believe in one God, who was above all their idols. He was invisible, they said, therefore they could make no image of Him.

If the history of the tribes who lived there before them could have been known, certainly, from the beginning it would have been found that there was at first no idolatry added to the true knowledge of the only God.

The men of this land, like the old inhabitants of Canaan, had not found it so easy to please God as to follow their own bad ways. They had gradually let drop one good thing after another, until but little was left of that pure and holy religion of the Patriarchs, who, when they obeyed the voice of God, often heard Him speaking to them from heaven.

The idolatry of the Aztecs had been getting worse and worse during the two hundred years that they had lived in the valley when Cortes reached it. To please their idols (as they thought) they did things so wicked, so cruel, and so awful, that every day they must have been pleasing Satan, that evil spirit, who goes about the earth, "seeking whom he may devour." The images of their gods were hideous.

Wicked men were their priests, men

PRIESTS SACRIFICING.

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who were doing the work of the evil spirit, and whose minds he had so blinded, that they believed a lie. They persuaded the people that nothing was so pleasing to God as human sacrifices; and when the warriors went out to fight, they took captive all they could in the wars, and brought them to the temples, and there they were cruelly put to death.

Great numbers of human beings had their lives thus cut short.

Their history reminds us of the history given in the bible of the old nations of Canaan, by whose example the children of Israel learnt "to shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they offered unto the idols of Canaan, and the land was defiled with blood." Some of the milder Tezcucans thought the Aztec religion too cruel.

They could look back to the time when, though the sun, moon, and stars, were worshipped as well as the Supreme God, yet human blood was not thought a necessary sacrifice. Men then brought offerings of the fruits of the earth, and flowers and sweet incense were burnt in the temples.

Two of the princes of Tezcuco (which was the city next in size to Mexico,) did all they could to restore the old religion. Prince Nezahualcoyotl—(A.D. 1470.) built a temple, on which he would not allow any idols to be placed.

He called it the temple to the "unknown God." At certain regular hours, priests, stationed at the top, struck a bar of metal, and the sound, like a deep-toned bell, reminded the people of the hour of prayer.

It seems that this prince served God by listening to the voice in his heart, which spoke words of peace when he did right, and words of sorrow and trouble when he thought of doing evil. This voice taught him to hate the Aztec superstition, and it encouraged him to set a good example to his subjects by his behaviour, as well as to teach them a better religion. Pleasant stories are told of his character, and of that of his son and successor; how they would cast off the robes of princes, and go among their people in disguise, for the purpose of doing good to them.

One day, as Prince Nezahualcoyotl (dressed in common clothes) was walking in a wood near the city, he met a peasant boy and stopped to have some talk with him. The boy complained that he could not gather sticks, "for," said he, "there

is a law against it; our prince is a hard man to deny us what God would give us."

The stranger asked him a few questions about his family, and found out where they lived. The next day these poor people were surprised by a message from the palace, commanding them to appear before the prince.

The boy was still more astonished to find who the stranger was to whom he had spoken so freely in the wood. He feared he might be punished for his bold words, but the Prince kindly said, he had not known before how much the forest laws injured his poorest subjects; that henceforth they should be altered, so that they might have leave to gather sticks, provided they did not injure the young trees.

By going among his people in this way, he learnt much more of their wants than he could have done at his Palace. His courtiers might there conceal all that they might think it would be painful for him to hear; but he saw misery with his own eyes when he went into the poorest huts.

He felt it was good to see these things, —that it was the only way to make him really compassionate, and after such visits he would give freely, as his princely heart delighted to do; and in times of scarcity would open his royal granaries to provide the poor with corn which had been laid by. He was a thoughtful man, and often retired from the noise of the city to one of his palaces in the country. Then he loved to think of the bright heavens where all was pure, and of the God who he believed was above all, and to pray that

his soul might rest with the good after death, and not be driven into that horrible place, where his conscience told him the wicked must suffer intolerable pains.

Before his death he talked to his son Nezahualpilli, and begged of him never to allow the Temple of Tezcuco to be stained by human sacrifices; and the son attended to his father's will, and was good and kind also. But after their death, the cruel religion of the Aztecs spread throughout the whole valley; and the number of slaves, put to death on the temples, increased more and more.

God heard the cry of innocent blood, as he had heard it before, in old times, in Canaan. He had patience with the Aztecs, as he had had with the Canaanites; and it was not till their iniquity was full, that "He who doeth what he will in the

armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth," permitted the sword to do its work in clearing from this part of the world so terrible an idolatry.

CHAPTER V.

HIEROGLYPHICS—SCHOOLS AND LEARNING—ASTRONOMY—UNLUCKY DAYS—TERROR AT THE END OF A GREAT CYCLE.

The Mexicans did not write as we do. They had a much more troublesome way of setting down what they wished to remember. If they had to write of trees, or birds, or houses, &c., they drew pictures of them. If there was no suitable picture for their word, they thought of something to represent it. Thus, it would not be possible to draw a picture of time, but they agreed that the picture of a serpent was always to mean "Time," and in the same way they invented pictures

HIEROGLYPHICS.

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for other words of a similar kind. Their picture-writing was painted, and they agreed on a meaning for every colour. The Ancient Egyptians also had this way of writing.

They drew the pictures as small as they could, with very few lines, in order to save time and space.

The characters, or shortened pictures, were called Hieroglyphics, and they made them much better than the Aztecs, whose writings were clumsy and took up very much room. The Mexicans had no paper like ours; but made use instead, of cotton cloth, or a smooth gummed silk, or the skins of animals nicely prepared, (like our parchment), but they most frequently wrote on the leaves of an Aloe called the Maguey. This plant flourished then, and still flourishes all over the table-lands.

It towers up so high, that a traveller, who not long ago rambled in Mexico, (Latrobe), says, that as he sat on horseback, it was often higher than his head. Its leaves were bruised into a paste, of which a smooth paper was made, which would bear the colours well, with which the writings were stained.

When the cloth, or silk, or Maguey leaf, was filled with hieroglyphics, it was the custom to fold it backwards and forwards like a fan or a folding screen, and to stiffen the outer leaf with a piece of board by way of binding.

The writings were sometimes rolled after the Egyptian fashion, but it was more usual to fold them. Thus, the children of Mexico, instead of learning their letters, learnt picture-writing, and many other useful arts were taught in

large schools, where the pupils were ruled over with great severity. By the time a child returned to its home, it had been taught to obey and be industrious. By learning obedience, it was prepared to live under the strict laws that grown up people had to submit to. Even the sons and daughters of nobles were not considered honourable, unless they were industrious. "Apply thyself, son," said an aged Chief, "to agriculture, or feather-work, or to some honourable calling. Thus did your ancestors before you. Never was it heard that nobility alone was able to maintain its possessor."

The children's memory was exercised by learning long traditional poems;—telling of the principal things that had happened since the eagle lighted on the swamps of Lake Tezcuco; and of events

still farther back, when the old Potters lived in the valley. Some of the picture-writing had but a word here and there to help the memory in repeating these long poems, and therefore had no meaning to those who did not know them.

Much of the learning of the Aztecs was false, and had better never have been taught. Such was all the instruction about their idols;—that the chief among them were most pleased with blood and cruelty, that rain might be prayed for from one, and fruitful seasons from another. Different days were given to the worship of each. These were days of festivity, celebrated by dances, and offerings of corn, and fruits, and flowers. There was the story of one God, who had instructed the people long ago in government, and agriculture, and the use of metals, and

would have made the land happier and better, but the fierce war-god drove him out. He sailed away (in a wizard skiff made of serpents' skins) across the sea far to the East, and he was to come again, in no long time, with a greater power than that of his old enemy. It was said, that this God had a white skin and a flowing beard. His name was Quetzalcoatli.

Then there was false teaching about Astrology; that the stars ruled over the birth of children, so that a man might be miserable for life, if he was born when they were in an unfavourable position. The heathen priests only taught this science to those who were also to be priests. They had found it useful in frightening people into obedience, and they could point out a way in which ample gifts might change a man's ill-luck into good fortune.

The Aztecs had received some true knowledge of Astronomy. The sun, and moon, and stars had been watched of old; —the regularity of their courses had been observed. It was seen how they might be always expected at certain seasons in the same positions. At first men knew that the firmament was the "work of God's hands, that the moon and stars were ordained by Him," that all this regularity was His doing;—but when they became wicked and did not like to think of a good God, some pretended that the Sun itself was a God. By studying the order of the heavens, they had learnt how to divide the year with regularity. In each year they had eighteen months, and in each month twenty days. But as there are 365 days and six hours in every year, they had five whole days left at the end of the eighteen months.

These they called unlucky days. If any death or sad event happened, it was thought to be because of the bad influence to be expected at such a time. There was a fear on all hearts then. Men went about with down-cast looks, waiting for evil; and wished the time away. Every fifty-two years the Aztecs called a great cycle. There were four smaller cycles in it, each thirteen years' long. In their picture-writing, a bundle of reeds tied together with a string meant a great cycle.

Instead of having one day more at the end of February every four years, as we have, they had thirteen extra days at the end of each great cycle.

The five unlucky days which occurred on the last year of every great cycle were given up to mourning and lamentation.

There was good cause to lament then. It was expected that the world would be destroyed at the end of a great cycle, and which cycle it would be, no one could tell.

Crowds were abroad on the evening of the last day to watch the sun-set; and, as the light faded and disappeared, doleful cries burst out from all, for they might never see that sun again. No sounds could be heard in the night air but weeping, and wailing, and lamenting, as long processions wound their way to some mountain temple in the neighbourhood of the cities. It was usual to keep fires always burning on the top of the temples, but at this unhappy time they were put out. All through the dreary night every eye was turned to the east, and when the light of day did really come again, and after their long watching, the glorious

sun showed his full face as he had done each morning, for so many ages past, there was a shout of joy from countless throngs, and fires were again lighted on the tops of every temple, and the thirteen extra days were spent in gladness and rejoicing, music and dancing, and thanksgiving. The deep grief of the five unlucky days, and the festivity of the thirteen joyful ones, were both stained by evil; such evil as the priests of a false religion taught, and the Heathen people blindly followed. They had learnt to call good evil, and evil good.

CHAPTER VI.

FOOD — FEATHER-WORK — THE MAGUEY — COURIERS — MARKETS — TRAVELLING MERCHANTS — SLAVES — MINERALS AND JEWELS — HOUSES AND HUTS.

In all knowledge of their duty to God, and of the life to come, the mind of the Aztecs was dark and confused, but they had many industrious occupations to make this life more pleasant.

It did not suit them to have for food only the flesh of the wild buffalo and other beasts, which must be hunted with danger and difficulty; or to live in tents, moving about from place to place; or to dispense with almost all clothing, as many of the tribes of American Indians did

then, and still do. But they established themselves in cities and villages, and carried on trades, and had flourishing markets, and cultivated their rich fruits, and loved and tended their flowers. They were practised in good cookery, and the taste and beauty of their dress, and the richness of their jewels, were such, that even European nations were astonished.

Feather-work was one of the arts peculiar to themselves. The outer robes for full dress were made of feathers, laid together with patient labour, and pasted, in rich patterns, on cotton cloth. The plumage of bright parrots, humming-birds, and every variety of the sunny birds of the tropics were collected for these splendid robes.

The mass of gay colour shone with living tints of blue, purple, scarlet, green,

in every shade, as the light shone on different parts.

Besides these in-doors' occupations, there was work to be done in the open air, in the fields, and on the mountains. There was no plant in Mexico so useful as the Maguey. Its juice was the favourite drink of the Aztecs. Its leaves, when whole, made a strong thatch for the Indian huts; when bruised, they made good paper. The sharp thorns at their ends served for needles and pins. The tough fibres of this giant plant were woven into a coarse cloth for common dress. Its root, when well boiled, was thought a nutritious food. It grew in strength and beauty over large tracts of ground everywhere.

If it were left to grow naturally, it would send up a flower-stalk, clustered

all over with yellow blossoms, towering to a stately height, out of the midst of a circle of dark green leaves.

It is still cultivated in Mexico. Those who tend it know when to expect the blossom. As soon as they see a ball of green leaves tightly wrapped together in the middle of the stem, they cut it out, for they do not wish the plant to bloom. The blossom is the only part that would be useless.

They then scoop into the trunk of the plant, till they have shaped a deep bowl. All the sap that would have risen and run into the little veins of every flower-leaf, to nourish the mass of bloom, and keep it fresh the whole summer long, pours into the hollow bowl. It is soon filled, and would overflow, but that labourers are there to watch the process, and to

empty the bowls as soon as they are full, by directing the juice through a tube into their goat-skin bottles.

Again the sap fills them, and again they are emptied, and this goes on all through the season, till a single plant has poured out 600 lbs. of sap. The plant then dies exhausted. Its juice ferments slightly in the leather bottles, and makes a refreshing drink. This drink is now called pulque. The botanical name for the Maguey is the Agave Americana.

No horses had ever been seen in Mexico till the Europeans introduced them. These useful creatures, and oxen, asses, camels, buffaloes, and various other animals, even dogs (whom we generally allow to lead an idle life) have been tamed in different parts of the world, to labour for man; but in Mexico, men and women did the

work of beasts of burden. Men were also employed as couriers or runners from one part of the country to another. The labour of bearing heavy loads and of running with speed could not be done without great practice.

A large number of couriers were kept in practice, from boyhood to manhood, in Mexico. They were chiefly employed in carrying messages from the Emperor to all parts of Anahuac. Convenient roads were made throughout the land, and at regular distances there were post-houses. When the Emperor's message, which was set down in picture-writing, was given in at the station, a fresh courier lost no time in running to the next post-house. If the Emperor fancied fish from the Gulf of Mexico, which was 200 miles from the capital, he might have it in twenty-four

hours. It is said that a well-trained courier could run 100 miles in a day. When the courier carried sad news of any sort he was dressed in mourning garments, if he bore joyful tidings he had gay clothing; so that at a distance those who saw him coming might partly tell what he had to say.

There were no shops in the cities of Mexico, and trade was not carried on every day, as it is with us. Each city had a large square market-place, with convenient shelter on every side of the square for the various goods exposed for sale. The compartments in which they were placed were open in front. The market was held every fifth day. As the months in Mexico were twenty days long, and there were four weeks in every month, each week had but five days in it. The

MEXICAN INDIANS GOING TO MARKET.

day of rest, so mercifully appointed by God for man, had been long quite forgotten among these idolatrous Indian tribes, and their fifth day was distinguished from the rest only as the most busy day of the week.

In the capital city (on the great Lake), where canals ran through so many of the streets, goods could be very easily brought to market in canoes.

The villagers all round had but to carry their Indian corn, pulque, flowers, or fruits, to the edge of the waters, and then they could sit at ease in their little boats for the rest of the journey; and such as had small floating islands had still less trouble.

When goods were to be sold at a distance, a merchant set out on his journey with a long train of attendants and slaves.

He prepared to be absent from home for a length of time. In our country, people who travel about with a pack of goods to sell, are not esteemed so highly as shopkeepers; but the travelling merchants of Mexico were among the highest people of the land. They were nobles, and the Emperor consulted them, as he did his other chiefs, on occasions of importance.

They travelled, not only throughout his dominions, but into neighbouring countries, and were sometimes employed to examine into the state of those provinces the Emperor designed to conquer. Thus, while they seemed to have no wish but to dispose of their wares, they were really deceiving those who bought of them, and were about to bring mischief into a peaceful land. The employment of merchants as spies seems to have been usual in old

times. We read in the Bible of Joseph accusing his brethren when they came to buy in Egypt, saying, "Ye are spies, to see the nakedness of the land, ye are come."

The travelling company were heavily laden. Each man was expected to carry a weight of from fifty to sixty pounds. It is likely that they went slowly along, and often rested under the shade of trees by the well-wooded mountain sides. The people of towns and villages remote from the more busy parts of Mexico, greatly rejoiced to see the travelling merchants. They would flock round them as they unfolded and spread out the splendid feather robes, and various ornaments of gold and jewels. What they could not purchase they could wonder at and admire, and if they were in need of useful cotton

cloths, and other wearing apparel, they laid in a stock.

Though the merchants were dishonourable to act as spies, they were highly honourable in buying and selling.

All the goods were sold by measure, not weight; and it was a law throughout Mexico, that there should be no unjust measures. A man appointed to rule over the market heard the complaints of those who said they had been cheated.

If he could not settle the dispute, he brought the accused person before higher officers, and when once a man was proved to have wronged another, he was put to death. The people, knowing how severe the laws were, feared to be unjust in their dealings.

Among the goods to be sold at market were slaves; and a long train of slaves

was part of the outfit of a travelling merchant. The largest slave market was at the town of Aztcapotzalco.

There they might be seen in crowds, sitting or standing about, while the buyers examined them, as they would cattle. The greatest number of slaves were captives taken in war. All who were not cruelly put to death in the temples, were sold as slaves.

Very poor people who could scarcely make a living, brought their children to the market to be sold. Public debtors—those who could not pay the taxes they owed to the government—were sold that payment might be made. In some countries, slaves are ruled over with the greatest tyranny, and a master in a fit of anger will think nothing of killing his slave; but it was not so in Mexico. The

laws would not allow it. They punished murder by death: the murder of a slave as well as of a chief. There were laws which forbade masters from overworking their slaves, who might have their own little huts, and live in them with their wives and families; and time was allowed them to cultivate their own cottage gardens. A master would not sell his slave again when once he had bought him, unless he behaved very badly, and was quite unmanageable. So that he was more like a well-used servant than a slave. It is likely that the very poor people, who sold their little children, knew that they would be well-used, otherwise, their conduct would seem too inhuman to be believed.

God had not only spread beauty all over the land of Mexico, forming the earth in such a way as that there were different

SILVER MINE.

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levels which produced the varieties of northern and southern fruits, and trees, and flowers, He had also hidden rich and beautiful things beneath the earth. In the depths of the mountains, were veins of gold and silver, diamonds, amethysts, emeralds, and other precious stones.

The ancient Mexicans knew how to work metals. They could clear away the refuse of earth, which always cleaves to them when first they are dug out of the dark mines. They knew how to purify them by burning heat, and could afterwards cast them in a variety of forms, and cut them into many shapes. They made sharp-edged tools of a dark transparent metal called obsidian, and could give the keenest edge to instruments made of a mixture of tin and copper. There was abundance of iron among the metals of

Mexico, but this they overlooked and never took the trouble to collect.

Without their sharp-cutting instruments, the precious stones would have been but of little value. An emerald, or amethyst, separated well from the earth out of which it was dug, looked certainly very glorious in colour, but it had to be smoothed and cut, and its many sides exposed to the sun-light before its highest beauty appeared. Emerald-green was the royal colour of Mexico. This green was almost as bright in the feathers of some of the Mexican birds, as in the living light of the Mexican jewels. The green plumes were set in a circlet for the brows of the Emperor, and his dress was clapsed with emeralds.

The Aztecs had vases of gold and silver more beautifully wrought than those of

STONE IDOL

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Spain. After casting these in moulds, they carved figures on them of birds or fishes, and they had the curious art of so mixing the metals that the scales of a fish and the feathers of a bird, were alternately of gold and silver. None of their jewels were thought too precious to be carried to the temples and given as offerings to the gods as they sat, grinning hideously, in their sanctuaries. Some idols were ornamented with masks of gold.

The Indian village huts are still made, as in old times, with a frame-work of bamboo, filled in and thatched with leaves. In the towns and cities the better houses were built of stone, dug out from the mountains near. The commonest kind of stone was easily cut. There was abundance of the harder and finer sorts, such as porphyry and alabaster. These

were made use of in the palaces and temples.

Such was the busy empire of Mexico, which Cortes, as he rested at Vera Cruz, made up his mind to win for Spain. He was not about to terrify a people like the soft Indians of Cuba, who would shudder at the sight of a drawn sword, or to bring his brave and well-disciplined little band against lawless clans of the American Indian tribes, who might be hunted down like wild buffaloes. But he thought to overthrow an established empire, with a despotic ruler at its head, whose authority was supported by nobles and chiefs, and whose very name was dreaded by his whole people; who had at his command throngs of warriors, firmly believing, (as they had been always taught) that death in battle was the noblest kind of death.

He calmly designed to cast down a religion which had thousands of priests in its service, and which was valued by the people above all things. They were as willing to fight and die for it as Cortes was to fight and die for his faith.

CHAPTER VII.

MONTEZUMA, HIS SUPERSTITION—HIS ROYAL PRESENT—FATHER OLMEDO SPEAKS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION—THE HEATHEN ARE OFFENDED—CORTES SETS OUT ON HIS MARCH TO MEXICO—AT CEMPOALLA THE PEOPLE ARE FRIENDLY—THE TLASCALANS RESIST HIM—BATTLE OF TLASCALA—VICTORY OF THE SPANIARDS—CHOLULA—TREACHERY AT CHOLULA—MASSACRE.

While Cortes rested at Vera Cruz, the emperor's picture-writers were at work there. They had drawn his ships before he sank them. They also drew his horses and men, and himself at their head. Couriers soon carried to their master's ears news of the arrival of the strange white men. The emperor looked at the scroll on which the Spanish ships ("water-

houses," as the Mexicans called them), and the war-horses with their riders were pictured, and when he heard a description of the kind of men who had come into his kingdom, his mind was troubled. He had a firm belief in all the priests had taught him of religion, and had been much employed in his youth in the service of the temples. He would do the meanest offices in them, and was even employed in sweeping the temple stairs, when he was borne away to be made Emperor. One might think, from his readiness to do this menial work, that he was of a lowly spirit, but it was not so. He behaved haughtily as emperor, and was dreaded, not beloved by his subjects. None of the former emperors had ever kept a more splendid court, yet Montezuma was unhappy amidst it all. He had been taught that the god

Quetzalcoatli, who had left Mexico years before, might soon be expected to return, and that then he must give up the power he so much loved, and become a subject, for that the god would reign. The pictures, and the description of Cortes made him fear that this god was at last come. It was said that he should arrive from the East, and that his followers, the Children of the Sun, (as they were called) should be white-skinned. The artillery of Spain, which had been heard at Vera Cruz, was like the thunder and lightning of the gods; and the horses (animals never seen in Mexico before) must be ruled by magic, to be so still and tame at one time, and so full of life and energy, when their riders spurred them on.

If they were really the dreaded gods, he felt that his duty was to receive them

with veneration. He had been taught that presents would make some gods change their intention. If he treated them magnificently, they might leave him for a time at least in peace. He resolved, therefore, to send a royal present.

The Emperors of Mexico received a yearly tribute from their subjects, of a part of all the various manufactures, and of the produce of the land. These valuable goods were laid up in store-houses, and were watched over and kept in order by people appointed for that purpose. The present was selected from these stores, and an Ambassador, with a hundred slaves in his train, was appointed to carry it from Montezuma to Cortes. He was to recommend Cortes to return to his own country, and to say the march to Mexico was so difficult that he would not

advise him to undertake it. The slaves unrolled matting, spreading it on the ground, and then laid the present at the white man's feet.

The Spanish soldiers wondered, as they looked on while the numerous packages were opened, and the ground was spread with a bright confusion of the choicest goods. "Shields, helmets, cuirasses—embossed with plates and ornaments of pure gold—collars and bracelets of the same metal; sandals, fans, crests of variegated feathers, intermingled with gold and silver thread, and sprinkled with pearls and precious stones; imitations of birds and animals in gold and silver, of exquisite workmanship; curtains, coverlets; robes of cotton, fine as silk, of rich and various dyes, interwoven with feather-work, which had all the delicacy of painting;" and,

besides all this, thirty loads of cotton cloth.

The sight of these things made the soldiers much more willing to go forward than any thing their commander had said to them. They began to think it was well that the ships had all been sunk. If gold and precious stones were so abundant that they were brought and laid at their feet, there could be no better country to spend their lives in. The Ambassador did not fail to give the Emperor's message with the present; but when Cortes heard of the difficulties of the road, he only answered quietly, that he should not fail to visit Montezuma in his own capital. It was evening when the train of slaves arrived, and as the conversation was going on between Cortes and the Ambassador, the vesper bell sounded,

and the heathen saw what to them was a strange sight, for all the soldiers fell down instantly on their knees to pray, fixing their eyes on a large wooden cross which was stuck in the sand near. The Mexicans stood wondering till they rose, and then Father Olmedo took occasion to say, (through Doña Marina, the interpreter) that the white men had come chiefly to destroy idolatry and to teach the true religion. He spoke so freely of the wickedness of their heathen customs, that the Ambassador, who had been talking till now in a friendly manner, went away displeased; and the people of Vera Cruz, who before had willingly supplied the army with food from their country villages, returned to their homes, and brought nothing readily any more.

Cortes had very little to send back, in

return for all the fine things he had received. He had with him, however, some chains of large cut glass beads, and as glass making was not one of the arts of this country, these splendid looking brilliants were thought, by the Mexicans, more valuable than precious stones. Thus, with very little expense, he could make it appear that his own land was not a poor one. By this time, the news of the arrival of the Spanish troops had been spread all through the country. Their valour was spoken of every where, and it was generally known that the tribe of the Totonacs had joined them. Now was the time to march forward, and the soldiers, were quite as eager to see more, as their commander. The armed knights were soon on their war-horses, and the few hundred followers of Cortes took their positions in the

greatest military order, and the troops of the Totonacs, whose friendship Cortes had accepted, crowded behind. As the Spaniards marched forward, they were surprised at every step by the great beauty of the scene. They soon lost sight of the bare red sand hills round Vera Cruz, and took their way over luxuriant plains, covered with the richest vegetation. The road sometimes opened to the sun, and was sometimes shaded by stately trees, whose branches were weighed down with flowering creepers; masses of such flowers as are cherished with the greatest care in the hothouses of Europe, carpetted the forest glades, with every variety of brilliant colour. Gay parrots chattered in the trees; and butterflies, like living flowers, revelled in the blossoms. Humming birds (in particular the scarlet cardinal) darted about in

the sun, and the sweetest notes of singing birds were heard in the shade.

As the army drew towards Cempoalla, an Indian city, some of the swarthy native people came out to meet them, with bunches and garlands of flowers in their hands. They gave the flowers to the soldiers and hung garlands of roses round the horses' necks, and threw one over the helmet of the captain.

It did not seem to Cortes that the road to the capital was so difficult as the Ambassador had said. It was a prosperous beginning to have flowers strewed in his path as if to welcome a conqueror.

The Cempoallans were willing to let fighting men join him, as the Totonacs had done, and if all the tribes had been of their mind, he would scarcely have needed to try the courage of his men.

But there were really difficulties in the way; quite enough to satisfy any knight-errant of Spain. The army had to pass through that tract of land possessed by the Tlascalans, and these independent people were no more willing to submit to foreigners, than they had been to submit to the armies of the Aztecs.

Four chiefs ruled over the Republic of Tlascala, and the capital city was divided into four quarters, that each chief might have an equal share. Each had his palace in his own quarter; a large, low, flat-roofed stone building, with spacious courts. Most of the common houses in Tlascala were built of mud, and had curtains instead of doors, made of matting and fringed all round with bits of copper to make a tinkling sound, when any body entered. It was the custom, when any important

matter was to be decided, that the four princes should meet in a large room, kept for that purpose, and talk over what was best to be done, and as there were many petty chiefs who could bring fighting-men to the battles, when it was needful, they were present also to hear and to speak. When it was known that the Spaniards were not far off from their city, they met. All had the same thing to say. They never *had* permitted foreigners to rule over them. Why should they now? Why should they, with many thousands of brave men, be afraid of a few hundred enemies? They scarcely thought it worth while to speak of the Totonacs who had joined the Spaniards, for they knew them to be a timid feeble people. There was one young man in the hall, who spoke more fiercely than all the rest.

Young prince Xicotencatl would rather die than submit to the white men.

As soon as they left the hall the chiefs called together their obedient vassals. They knew that the Spaniards were not very far off, and hastened to be ready for them. One important thing they forgot to do in their haste. This was to guard the entrance to the wall, which the Aztecs had so often tried to force in vain; and Cortes with his followers got through the narrow passage, while they were assembling the army on the plain. When the people came out with garlands to welcome him at Cempoalla, it was not so gay a sight as he now saw. War was holiday time to this fierce people, and when they prepared to fight, the common soldiers, who had scarcely any clothing, painted their dark skins with the gaudiest colours,

and the chiefs threw over their cotton-quilted dress, the feather mantles which had every colour of the rainbow.

"Not half so gorgeous for their May-day mirth;
All wreathed and ribanded, our youths and maids,
As these stern Tlascalans in war attire!
The golden glitt'rance, and the feather mail,
More gay than glittering gold; and round the helm
A coronal of high upstanding plumes;
Green as the spring grass, in a sunny shower:
Or scarlet bright, as in the wintry wood,
The clustered holly, or of purple tint."

The morning sun shone on this gay scene. It brightened the copper-headed lances of the Tlascalans, and the polished armour of the Spaniards, and when the evening sun went down, the poor gay-painted bodies lay in multitudes dead on the plain; their souls had been sent suddenly into the presence of the great God, the Judge of all the earth. Mourning dresses would have been fitter for a battle

than all the finery of holiday clothes. The young prince Xicotencatl fought bravely, but neither he nor his countrymen had ever been attacked by men so strong and well-armed as the Spaniards. The Spanish war-horses had terrified and trampled down the unprotected soldiers, and towards evening, all who had not been slain fled away. The Indian chiefs met again, and though they spoke more fearfully than before the battle, they would not yet think of submitting. Xicotencatl said, that after a weary day of fighting, the enemy would surely be asleep. He was willing to head another host,—to fall upon them, and crush them before they could be roused. It was a daring proposal for the young prince to make; for it was not the custom among the Indians to fight by night. They had a terror of the darkness

and would not readily expose themselves to it. It would have been well if the usual terror had kept them quiet now. They did not yet know that Cortes would have scorned any soldier who could not be ready armed day or night, at a few moments' notice, in any time of danger. They did not know that the sharp-eyed sentinels saw the dark hosts moving towards them,—that Cortes had notice given him of it directly, and with the least possible noise, every soldier armed. By the time the Indians had reached that part of the plain where they thought the white men lay asleep, the whole five hundred were ready to move, like one man, at the word of their general.

As soon as the Tlascalans were sure, by the slow tramp of the dreaded war-horses, that the enemies they so much dreaded

were as full of life by night as by day, they almost believed that they might indeed be gods who did not need sleep. They fled away in tumult, and were more completely overthrown than they had been a few hours before. After this the old chiefs thought it unwise to fight any more. Now they remembered how much they hated the Aztecs, and Cortes easily persuaded them that if they were friendly with him, he was able to protect them against all the armies of Montezuma.

Prince Xicotencatl was obliged to seem friendly too, but in his heart he was grieved. He would rather have fought on. The timid Totonacs had all slipped away before the battle of Tlascala; but in their place, Cortes had now a much more useful addition to his army. The Tlascalans were a people who were not afraid

PYRAMID OF THE SUN.

p. 107.

to keep their word when they promised to be friendly. They would not run away at the first real danger.

Cortes had now but one tract of table-land to pass over before reaching Mexico. This was Puebla. The Republic of Cholula, and the holy city of Cholula, (as it was called,) stood on this plain. There were more priests and more temples in Cholula than in any other city, and pilgrims went from all parts to visit it. The temples of Anahuac were all built alike; they only differed in size. They were all mounds of stone and earth, in the shape of pyramids, winding stairs on the outside led to a flat space on the top, on one part of which were small buildings, where the images of various idols were set up. Fires were kept burning on the tops of all the pyramids, and there it was

that human beings were often cruelly put to death to please the gods. Round the base of the pyramids were large courts, and just within a low stone outer wall, were ranges of buildings, in which the priests lived, and where they instructed those who should afterwards be priests, in their false religion. The people beneath, in the city, often had a sight of the long line of priests dressed in flowing robes, as they wound up the temple stairs. Then they trembled for fear of the gods who were said to be so cruel. The largest pyramid in the world, was near this holy city, and there it is still. The outside stairs, and the whole surface, have long been grown over with plants of various kinds, so that it looks more like a hill than a building made by man's hands. Its base covers forty-four acres, and some

have thought that it really is a hill cased with stones and bricks; but as far as curious travellers have had it excavated, they have found nothing but layers of brick and stone, and this has led them to think that it really must be a building.

Tlascala, the "land of bread," was well supplied with corn, as one may know from the name; but it was poorer than Cholula in other things. The Tlascalans had shut themselves so much off from their neighbours, that they were obliged to do without many things manufactured in other parts, which they would have liked to buy. Cortes observed that the dress of the Cholulans was much richer than any he had yet seen. Their long mantles were beautifully embroidered and clasped with jewels. They behaved to the Spanish army just as the people of

Cempoalla had done, and brought out garlands of flowers to throw at their feet. But their show of kindness was deceitful. They had determined to bring the army into their city, and then to destroy them all. The wife of one of the Indian chiefs thought that Doña Marina (the young slave who acted as interpreter,) would be glad to hear that the white men were likely to be destroyed. She might then live again among her own countrymen, and perhaps be made free. But the Spaniards had been kind to Marina, and she felt grateful to them. She was rejoiced to be able to show her gratitude, by telling Cortes all that the Indian woman had revealed to her. The time was drawing on when the war-cry would be heard all round the long range of buildings which had been cleared for the use of the Spanish army, and where they were now

quartered. The many thousand citizens of Cholula would hem them in on every side, and there seemed no hope of escape.

After what Cortes had done at Tlascala, he was confident that on an open battle field he might drive away thousands before him. But it was quite another thing to be shut within the walls of a city, and surrounded by enemies. He was never long in deciding on what was to be done in difficulties. He did not know what it was to fear. He now determined to show the Cholulans his strength before they should have time to make all their preparations to destroy him. He commanded his officers and soldiers to be ready armed, and to wait his orders. He then sent a message to the chiefs of Cholula, to say that he wished to hold a conference with them, and as they were anxious to appear friendly, that he might not suspect their

treachery, they readily came; and, soon a large open square in the city was quite filled with nobles and their attendants. Then Cortes rose and spoke to them through Marina. He calmly told them that he knew all they had designed to do against himself and his army. He would have wished to be at peace with them, but now he must show them what it was to provoke his anger. He then gave the signal to his officers, and the Spanish soldiers fell on the unarmed multitudes and killed them in great numbers. The whole city was filled with terror at the strength of the "white gods," (as they now began to call the Spaniards.) The people trembled to think that they had provoked an enemy, who could not only triumph over many times their number in battle, but could see into their hearts, (as they thought,) when they plotted mischief.

CHAPTER VIII.

DIFFICULTIES OF THE ROAD—THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING MOUNTAIN—BEAUTY OF THE VALLEY OF MEXICO—THE RECEPTION OF CORTES—MONTEZUMA'S PALACE—CITY OF MEXICO.

CORTES had certainly found difficulties in the road, as the ambassador from Montezuma had said he would; but the difficulties had been all useful to him. Every thing that had happened had served to show the Indians how strong the Spanish army was, and it put all the officers and soldiers in high spirits to think that none had yet been able to stand before them. The Emperor would respect their strength when he heard that

the Tlascalans, who had always been able to resist the Aztec arms, had been completely beaten by the Spaniards. Montezuma had given orders that trees should be cut down and thrown across the best roads that led from Puebla to the Valley. It was foolish to do this, for he could hardly suppose that Cortes, who had cut his way through thousands of armed men, would turn back because of a rough road. The work of the Emperor was soon undone by the Spanish and Tlascalan soldiers, and the army marched forward. They had now reached the foot of two large snow-topped mountains, which stand like giants, as if to guard the entrance to the Valley of Mexico. The name of one of these was, "Iztaccihuatl," or the "White Woman." The other was called "Popocatapetl," or the "hill that smokes."

VOLCANIC MOUNTAIN OF POPOCATAPETL

17,875 *feet high.*

p. 111.

The last is 17,852 feet high, 2,000 feet higher than the highest European mountain. A rumbling like deep thunder was often heard in it, and then it cast out fiery stones and smoke. The Indians had a great fear of these volcanic mountains. They dreaded them because they did not know that He who "touches the hills and they smoke," is a kind Father to take care of such as trust in Him. They therefore passed the mountains by quickly, and were glad to be out of the sound of the rumbling within them.

One of the brave knights who followed Cortes, was Diego Orday. It pleased his proud spirit to think that the natives looked on him, and all his company, as beings superior to themselves, and he determined to do something which should astonish them. He had heard them talk

of the danger of going too near the mountain, and that it would be impossible to ascend to the top. Orday therefore got leave from his commander to take with him nine men, and to climb the sides of "Popocatapetl" as far as he could go. A few Tlascalans, who did not like to be outdone in bravery, begged to be taken also, and the party set out on their way. It was not very easy to force a passage through the dark pine forest at the base of the mountain. No pathways had been made in it, and the trees grew very thickly together, and shut out the light of day. The Tlascalans were weary and beginning to be frightened: when they heard a distant rumbling of the volcano, they slunk away. At every step, as the Spaniards went higher, there were fewer trees; and at last they came to the end of the forest

and stood on rocky ground, in which no tree would grow. It was formed of lava. Burning substances, which had rolled from time to time, through many ages, from the mountain top, lay in rugged masses before them, cold and bare. It was as difficult and fatiguing to climb over this, as it had been to work their way through the tangled forest; but they went on and reached the region of snow and ice. Every step now was painful—their limbs were benumbed with cold. The ice lay in thick masses, and where it had slipt away, there were deep clefts and chasms. The thundering noise within the mountain went on; and higher up, cinders and smoke, falling from the top, nearly blinded their eyes. Orday found that he could go no farther. He broke some large icicles from a jutting crag

near, to show that he had been to that part from whence the Indians thought no man could return alive, and then he turned and descended the mountain. When the nine weary men, with Orday at their head, came in sight of the army, the Tlascalans wondered still more than they had ever yet done at the courage of the white men; and those who had slunk away afraid, persuaded the rest that there was more danger in the ascent than there really was.

After this Diego Orday was called the Knight of the Burning Mountain, and when Cortes, in a letter to Charles V. of Spain, told him of the exploit, the sovereign said that Orday might take a burning mountain as his family crest; and they have borne it ever since. Other knights afterwards, from time to time, ascended

the volcanic mountains of Mexico, and it is said that, on one occasion, a party of adventurers having reached a crater, or deep hollow at the top, where fire was smouldering, they drew lots who should be let down into it. The lot fell on Francesco Montano, (the knight who had proposed the adventure;) and his companions let him down in a basket, that he might collect sulphur for the use of the army. There was scarcely any thing too bold or daring for a Spanish knight of those times to undertake; but it is not unlikely that some of the stories told of them may have been made more wonderful than they really were, by the story-teller.

The army of Cortes had toiled over many weary miles, and had worked hard in fighting, and in clearing the roads, which

had been blocked up; but when they reached the spot where they could first see the Valley of Mexico, they thought it well worth encountering any danger and difficulty only to look upon the scene which lay before them. There were the five broad lakes, like inland seas, bordered with corn fields, orchards, and gardens, filled with every variety of flowers; the Chinampas, or floating islands, gently rocking on the lakes; forests of oak, and sycamore, and cypress, stretching away over the distant hill-sides. There was the curious city of Mexico, the "Queen of the Valley," with her pyramids and temples, on the lake of Tezcuco; and many other cities partly appearing, and partly buried behind the trees; and villages down to the edges of the lakes, and a busy people moving about at their various labours;

their canoes darting here and there on the sparkling waters. The clear air of that high region (which, though circled all round with steep mountains, is itself 7,500 feet above the sea) brightened the most distant objects. A traveller,* who saw the valley but lately, says, "It burst upon me like a beautiful dream. I never saw, and I think I never shall see on earth, a scene comparable to it."

Yet it is not now what it was about 300 years ago, when Cortes first saw it. The waters of the lakes, particularly those of the salt lake of Tezcuco, have shrunk away† so as to leave a broad bare border, where no trees or plants will grow; and Mexico, instead of being an island

* Latrobe.

† Humboldt accounts for this by the rapid evaporation going on in that high region.

city, stands now on dry land, at some distance from the edge of the waters, which once circled it on every side. Cortes must have had other thoughts in his mind besides admiration of the beautiful scene which lay before him. He must have thought of the time when, as a young man, he longed to see the New World, and when afterwards, under the haughty Velasquez of Cuba, he had wished to be in command himself, instead of holding the place of an inferior officer; and when at length he had been appointed Captain-General of a small fleet, and sent away to examine the coast of the Gulf of Mexico: and he must have wondered to think of all that had happened since; that he, an unknown adventurer, had already compelled one tribe after another to look on him as a superior being; that he had

dared to defy the despotic sovereign of a mighty empire; that after openly disobeying him, and showing how little he feared his power by forcing through the obstacles placed, by the Emperor's orders, in his road, he was now about to appear in his presence, and to trust himself and his little army in the very midst of a people who might turn out to be enemies. They might appear friendly as the Cholulans had done, while they were secretly plotting to destroy him. But Cortes, if he had any fear, would not have come so far as this. He firmly believed that he should overawe the Aztecs as he had done the other tribes, and now he looked on the sunny valley, not so much as the seat of Montezuma's court, as a Spanish possession, won by his sword for his Emperor.

Cortes now spurred forward his horse,

and backed by his well-armed knights, and followed by the Spanish foot-soldiers, and a large number of Tlascalan allies, he entered a city which lay between him and Mexico. This was Amaquemacan. It was built on one of the lakes, in the same way as Mexico. The young prince of Tezcuco had come as far as this from his own capital to give the Spaniards a kind welcome. He had heard enough of the doings at Tlascala, to wish to be at peace; and in token of friendship, he presented to the General three large and beautiful pearls.

The native Indians, who knew that Cortes would have to cross a causeway four or five miles in length before he came to Mexico, had thronged it on both sides in their canoes, eager to see men all cased in steel, on the backs of animals so easily

guided, yet seeming so strong, and in their sight so terrible. Those who were bold enough, clambered up the sides of the causeway, and threw flowers on the necks of the horses, and at the feet of the men. When Montezuma heard that the Spaniards had entered the Valley, he commanded that several hundred of his nobles should make ready to attend him. He would go to the entrance of the city to meet Cortes. The people of Mexico greatly feared and wondered at their Emperor; and as he passed along the principal street (leading from the palace to the great causeway), borne in his palanquin, on the shoulders of nobles, they looked down from their flat-roofed houses, and thought of him more as a god than as a man.

The army had to pass through a stone

gateway, battlemented at the top, with a tower at each end, called the fort of Xoloc, and the barrier was closed behind them. They were now shut into a city well defended all round by deep waters, and where causeways led to the land by strong forts, like this of Xoloc. The street they had entered was a very broad one, and the houses on each side low, so that the crowds on the house-tops could see plainly the curious foreigners, of whom they had heard so much. Their wonder was mixed with hatred, when they saw the crowd of Tlascalans behind, who would not have dared to show their faces in Mexico, but that they believed the Spaniards were strong enough to protect them.

The royal company halted as Cortes drew near. The nobles set down the palanquin, and spread mantles on the

ground that the Emperor's foot might not touch the earth, and Montezuma stepped out and stood on them. A canopy of feathers was held over his head. He was tall, and thin, and his complexion swarthy, like that of his subjects. His features were regular and intelligent, with a look of great composure. His dress added to the royal dignity of his appearance. He wore a long flowing mantle, and a circlet of green plumes, set in a band round his head. The nobles nearest to him were all barefoot. This was their way of showing reverence: but Montezuma wore sandals, and their leather thongs were embossed with gold. The Spaniards, who loved the sight of wealth, saw that the palanquin was also ornamented with large gold plates, and the imperial dress covered with precious stones. When Montezuma looked on

the Spanish general, who dismounted and drew near, he though he saw before him the god Quetzalcoatli. Certainly the oracles *had* said that that god was to come peacefully, and Cortes had fought and killed. Still it was well known that Cortes had only fought with those who could not be made to submit by kind words. And the knights behind him, all clad in armour, seemed to the Emperor "children of the sun." The gleaming of their steel mirrors was like a reflection of his beams.*

Friendly words passed betwen the Emperor and Cortes. Doña Marina was at hand to interpret what each said; and the Emperor having stept again into his palanquin, the army marched forward through the principal street of the city, wondering, as they went along, at its size and magni-

* Steel was a metal unknown to the Aztecs.

ficence; the spacious squares and pyramidal temples, where fires were burning at mid-day. The street was several miles in length, and ended in a spacious square. On one side rose the largest pyramid in the city, a temple dedicated to the war-god. On another was the Emperor's palace, and opposite it another palace built by a former Emperor. This unused building had been prepared for Cortes, and he was led through a gate in a low stone wall which surrounded it, and entered the principal apartment, which was furnished after the fashion of the country. The floor was strewed with rushes, and the walls festooned with gaily coloured cotton hangings. Here Montzeuma took from the hand of a slave a massive gold collar, and hanging it round the General's neck, said, "This palace belongs to you and your

brethren. Rest after your fatigues, for you have need to do so; and in a little while I will visit you again." Cortes knew that he was taken for a god, and he encouraged the people in their superstitious fears of him. As soon as Montezuma had left, he ordered a grand discharge of artillery. As the canuon thundered and bellowed, and the sulphurous smell of the smoke spread abroad, there was great terror throughout the city, to think that a power, like that within the volanic mountains, was in the very heart of it.

Cortes did not delay to return the Emperor's visit. He dressed himself magnificently. Velvet and steel, and the rich dress of Spain, were as curious in the eyes of the Mexicans, as the Aztec feather-mantles and jewels in those of the Spanish soldiers.

He took with him Orday, the Knight of the Burning Mountain; Alvarado, who was always called a "child of the sun," from his bright golden hair; Sandoval, the bravest and best of all the knights; and Velasquez de Leon, and, followed by five or six men, crossed the square and entered the palace. It would not have been lawful for any noble of Mexico to enter his master's presence as Cortes did. They could only appear before him barefoot, and had to throw over their usual robes a dress of the coarsest cloth, such as was worn by peasants. Cortes was surprised at the magnificence and luxury of the palace. The rooms were low, but very large; the ground covered with palm-leaf matting, and the walls hung either with the sleek, brightly spotted furs of wild animals, or with feather-work, or

with gaily stained cotton hangings. The ceilings were of carved cedar and other sweet woods, and the whole building (like the Temple of Solomon) had been put together without a nail. The Spaniards described the great extent of this palace by saying, that "thirty knights might have run their courses in a regular tourney over its flat roofs."

The numerous apartments opened upon beautifully kept gardens, where the brilliant flowers and shrubs of Mexico were carefully arranged and trained. Ten large reservoirs of water, bordered with a tesselated marble pavement, were kept well stocked either with water-fowl or fish. Sparkling fountains played here and there among the flowers. There were aviaries for every variety of bird—the scarlet cardinal, the golden pheasant, parrots, and

the many-coloured humming birds; and in contrast with these, in other parts of the grounds, eagles and specimens of the vulture tribe were confined. At a distant part of the wide domain, was a menagerie for wild beasts; and there was also a collection of such human beings as had been stunted in growth, and deformed in various ways, thus treating these poor afflicted children of God's family, as if they were but brutes.

Numbers of Mexican youths were trained to serve in the palace gardens; they were taught the nature and habits of the birds, and were careful in the moulting season to collect all the feathers that were dropped about; for the cast-off clothing of birds was the material for making the best finery the Mexicans ever invented. Others learnt the treatment and arrange-

ment of plants and shrubs. It required 300 servants to take charge of the aviaries alone; 500 turkeys was the daily supply of food for the birds of prey. The same attendance was given to the beasts and reptiles, among which was a large collection of serpents, so that the palace buildings and outer courts were well filled with an industriously employed people.

This city-palace was not Montezuma's favourite residence. There was one on the hill of Chapoltepec, in another part of the valley, where he preferred to be. It had well-wooded pleasure grounds which stretched for miles round the base of the building.

Cortes, when with his knights he was ushered into the presence of the Emperor, told him at once what he had visited Mexico to do. He said he had come

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chiefly to overturn idolatry, and to show the true religion; that he acted in the name of a great King, who required the Emperor to submit to his dominion. Montezuma answered, that he knew well his ancestors had not always ruled in Mexico; that the god Quetzalcoatli had once governed there, and was expected to return; that he had all along believed Cortes and his followers to be messengers from this god; that he would certainly submit to his will. He hoped only that the great being would permit him still to rule Mexico, though in his name. "And I," said he, "you may have heard such accounts of me as may have led you to suppose that I also am a god; but it is not so. See, I am but flesh and blood (baring his tawny arm); and I will rule in the name of your sovereign."

To this he added, that he had been told the Spaniards had trampled down many Indians with their horses' hoofs, and terrified them with their thunder and lightning; but he believed beings so courteous as they seemed, could not be so cruel. After this, he loaded them with gifts, and they left. Cortes thought there might be some deceit under these smooth words. He could not yet tell what Montezuma meant by saying he would submit entirely to Spain. While thoughts were working in his mind as to what it might be needful for him to do some day or other in Mexico, he made himself well acquainted with all parts of the city. He saw that the deep channels of water which intersected the streets in many parts, were crossed by draw bridges, and that if these bridges were lowered, his army

might find it very difficult to get out of their present quarters. There were as many as five channels between the grand square and the causeway by which he had entered. Other causeways led to the main land, and the road to them might be as easily cut off. Cortes observed the order and regularity and industry of the city. An old soldier who was with him, and afterwards wrote of these times, said, "You could walk through the streets of Mexico with as little danger of soiling your feet as your hands." A thousand men were kept constantly employed in cleaning the streets.

He visited the great market place, a spacious square, where every fifth day the trade of the city was carried on; for there were no shops in Mexico, and every one bought and sold on this day only. The

square was surrounded by colonnades; and in the porticoes, open in front, the various goods were laid out. The stalls were decorated with a great profusion of flowers. There were goldsmiths from Azcapozalco; potters and jewellers from Cholula; painters from Tezcuco; fishermen from Cuitlahuac; fruiterers from the warm sloping lands near the coasts; mat and chair makers from Quauhtitlan; florists from Xochimilco. There were golden ornaments and toys in imitation of birds and fishes; vases of wood, carved, varnished, and gilt, of curious and graceful forms. In other parts were arranged soldiers' weapons, and these Cortes looked at with particular interest. He might again have to fight with the native Indians, and here lay their armour. The casque was carved to represent the head

of some wild animal with grinning teeth, and its crest stained with Cochineal to look fierce. There were copper-headed arrows, such as he had seen in use at Tlascala; but there was nothing so formidable as the sword of Spanish steel which he wore at his own side.

In other parts of the market were barbers' booths; the razors and mirrors were made of a hard polished mineral. The art of glass-making was not known. Here, was a pile of blank books for hieroglyphical writing; and there, drugs and roots sold by apothecaries. There were hides, raw and dressed, for clothing; animals wild and tame offered for sale; and slaves also, for sale, with collars round their necks. The heavier goods, such as stone, timber, and lime, were bought and sold in another part of the

city. The provision market was stocked with meat and domestic poultry. Turkeys, of which so large a number were required every day for the voracious birds of prey, were the commonest kind of poultry. There was game from the neighbouring mountains, fish from the lakes, and fruits in abundance. A food made use of only by the poorest in the city, was a glutinous scum from the lake, which, when dry, was formed into cakes. This was the cheapest and commonest food. One of the favourite dainties, was the froth of chocolate consolidated. Montezuma liked this so well, that he used it at every meal. He eat in solitary state. His waiting maidens understood cookery well. As he sat on the floor of his banquet-room, hidden by an ornamented screen, as if too noble and great for

common eyes to look on, the chiefs set before him, from time to time, fish fresh from the Gulf of Mexico, meats and game of all sorts, and the juice of the maguey; while girls were employed in kneading delicate cakes of maize flour, eggs, and the sugar of the aloe. By way of showing favour to some noble, the Emperor would offer a portion from his plate to him; as a master might throw a morsel to his favourite dog.

Montezuma never used a second time the service of fine Chululan ware from which he eat. As tribute to the Emperor was paid in goods instead of money, he might easily have a large variety in use. It was said that he never wore the same dress a second time. The mantles, once worn, were distributed among the chiefs, and new ones brought out of the treasure house.

Cortes observed that the women of Mexico were to be seen in the streets as well as the men, and that they had no other veils than their long black hair. Some were robed in furs or feather-work; others wore several petticoats, of various lengths, over one another, and brightly coloured boddices.

Cortes did not go alone through the streets of Mexico. He was attended by his soldiers; and Montezuma and his train led the way. The kind look and courteous manners of Cortes had won upon the Emperor from the first, and believing him to be a messenger from a higher world, he felt an awe, as well as an affection for him.

Cortes had done enough to show that he had no fear; and, perhaps, Montezuma, since he had been Emperor, had

never met with any one who did not fear him in the least, and who spoke to him always with freedom and decision. He gave the Spanish general a new name, and always after the first interview, called him Malintzin.

CHAPTER IX.

PYRAMID—NEWS FROM VERA CRUZ—MONTEZUMA MADE PRISONER—SEVERITY OF CORTES TOWARDS AN AZTEC PRINCE—ANGER OF THE HEATHEN PRIESTS, WHEN THEY FIND THEIR RELIGION IS DESPISED—DISCONTENT OF THE SPANISH SOLDIERS—TROUBLE SUFFERED BY CORTES FROM THE JEALOUSY OF VELASQUEZ—CORTES MARCHES TO CEMPOALLA—LEAVES ALVARADO IN COMMAND IN MEXICO—THE SUDDEN VICTORY OF CORTES OVER NARVAEZ, THE MESSENGER FROM VELASQUEZ.

When the whole party returned to the palace square to examine the great pyramid, the Emperor proposed that four of his nobles should carry Cortes to the top on their shoulders; but he refused, and preferred to march up the winding stairs outside the building, at the head of his

men. When he came to the top, "You are weary, Malintzin, with climbing our Temple," said Montezuma. "The Spaniards are never weary," was the proud answer; and it was not far from the truth. The plan of the city could be well seen from the top of the pyramid. All the main streets branched out from this palace square.

The image of a serpent, covered with precious stones, was wound round the waist of the war-god in the sanctuary, at the top of the temple. All round the stone wall which enclosed the outer courts, there were images of serpents; and a great drum made of serpents' skins, (only beat in times of great distress,) was kept in the sanctuary. It was as if the Evil Spirit (called in the Bible the Serpent) had put it into the heart of these heathen

to make images of himself. Cortes could not bear to see marks of the cruelty of the heathen worship. He would have had the cross planted at once on the pyramid, but father Olmedo persuaded him to wait for a more fit time.

While things were going on so quietly in the capital, there came a messenger to the General, from Vera Cruz, to say that an Aztec chief had attacked one of his officers there, and that it was by the command of the Emperor that he had done it. As soon as Cortes heard this, he determined to make Montezuma his prisoner. He went at once to the palace with five armed knights; told him what he had heard, and said there was but one way in which he could show to all Mexico that he really was friendly to the Spaniards and that he had not been

deceiving them all along with a show of kindness. This was by coming to live among them for a time. Montezuma was surprised and angry. He had commanded the presence of his subjects hitherto, whenever he chose; but it was a new thing to be ordered out of his own luxurious dwelling, and invited to a place which, in his royal magnificence, he had so lately ordered to be cleared for the Spanish troops. At first he refused to go; but one or two of the knights spoke threateningly, and when Marina interpreted their rough words, the Emperor was afraid to refuse any longer. He, therefore, ordered his palanquin to be made ready, and told his nobles that he was about to pay this visit for his own pleasure.

Cortes treated his prisoner with the

greatest respect and kindness, and ordered his followers to behave to him as if he were still emperor. He contrived amusements for him, and would make his soldiers show their feats of arms in the open courts of the building, while Montezuma looked on. Still Montezuma was a close prisoner, and could not go forth even to worship in the temple, without a strong guard of Spanish soldiers.

The Aztec prince, who had dared to attack an officer of Cortes in Vera Cruz, was now brought to Mexico. Cortes meant to punish him in such a way as to terrify the whole city. He condemned him to be burnt to death, with his son and fifteen chiefs, his attendants; and as he still said that he had attacked the Spaniards in obedience to the commands of

his sovereign, Cortes, to show that he was really the chief ruler in the country, gave orders that Montezuma should be thrown into irons until the sentence was executed. Montezuma was so completely humbled by the treatment he had received, that he never ventured afterwards to offend Cortes, but took more and more pleasure in loading him with gifts.

Cortes had brought with him from Cuba, Martin Lopez, a Spanish ship-builder. He now set him to build two ships, thinking that they might be of great use, if it should ever be needful to escape from the city. There were sails, and cordage, and every thing necessary for the fitting out of a large number of vessels at Vera Cruz. All these useful materials had been saved when the fleet was sunk. Cortes sent for such of

them as were needed. By the orders of the Emperor, Indian workmen helped in felling wood; and when the two ships were built and launched, an awning was spread above the deck of one of them, and the Spanish general invited his royal prisoner to sail with him across the lake, that they might enjoy a hunt in the forests beyond.

The name Montezuma signifies "the sad, or angry lord." It was a name that suited him well; for though the firmness and fearlessness of Cortes had entirely overawed him, and his kindness had won his heart, so that he loved as well as feared the Spaniard, yet he could not help feeling both sad and angry to think that he had now no will of his own, and that his subjects might be beginning to despise him as weak and cowardly. It had been very

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vexatious to all the people of Mexico, to see Tlascalans in their city.

Some few had felt (like the Emperor) only terror and superstitious awe of the "white men," but by far the greatest number were enraged, that so few should think it possible quietly to take possession of the empire. They saw, indeed, the strength of those few men, and that they had weapons such as no Aztec wore; but they believed that the large multitude regularly trained to fight, who would attack them the instant the Emperor should command it, would be sufficient to destroy them all. Montezuma was not mistaken when he thought that his subjects would soon despise him as a coward. There were none among the people so angry at the boldness of Cortes as the heathen priests. They saw, that if he made out

their religion to be false, they should lose all the respect of the people, and rich offerings would no longer be brought to the temples. They were enraged to see the whole band of Spanish soldiers march one day to the top of the principal pyramid, singing the Te Deum to God, and place the cross of Christ, and an image of the Virgin Mary, in the sanctuary at the top. They determined to bear such insults no longer. Ever since Montezuma had been a prisoner, he had been allowed to see his subjects. The nobles came before him just as formerly with their coarse dress and bare feet; and the priests now brought their complaints to him. Father Olmedo had often tried to persuade the Emperor to give up idolatry, and become a Christian; but Montezuma, who would listen attentively and respectfully to all

that he said, always answered, that "the God of the Christians was a good God; but the gods of his own country were the true gods for him."

His mind was now troubled by what the heathen priests said, and he ventured to tell Cortes plainly that it would be very dangerous for him to remain longer in Mexico. The people might be stirred up to fall on him, and to offer him and his soldiers up as sacrifices to the gods. Cortes showed no fear when he heard this. He only answered that he should be sorry to leave the country just now, for that if he left, he must take the Emperor with him.

But there was really cause to fear, though he spoke so calmly. There was discontent among his own soldiers. They were living in idleness, and had no good and useful pursuits to employ

their spare time. When not fighting they were gambling, and thus many lost all their share of the riches they had gained in Mexico.

Some complained that they had not had their full share of gold and treasure. Besides Montezuma's frequent gifts, Cortes had received tribute himself from the people. He set apart a fifth of all for the Emperor; the knights had a liberal share, and at another time the soldiers would have thought themselves rich with what fell to their lot; but now the very sight of so much gold made them more greedy, and they murmured. They loved gold and worldly riches quite as much as the heathen could, yet they thought themselves good Christians, and would not omit to fall on their knees morning and evening, in prayer to God. Yet that Saviour before

whose cross they so often fell, would have said to them, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust do corrupt, and where no thieves break through nor steal." Their eager desire for gold now made them troublesome to their commander, but they were greatly attached to him; and a few kind words and fair promises quieted them speedily. There was a more serious cause for alarm, than the anger of the heathen priests and discontent of his own soldiery.

Just at this time a fleet arrived at Vera Cruz from Cuba. Ever since Cortes had left the island, Velasquez had repented that he had ever intrusted him with so high a command, and he had resolved at

once to fit out a much better fleet than any that had before left Cuba, and to set an officer over it who would be more submissive to his orders than Cortes was ever likely to be. It was some months before this fleet was ready. It was put under the command of Panfilo de Narvaez, who was ordered to send Cortes back to Cuba, and to take his place. Narvaez sent messengers to Mexico to inform Cortes what Velasquez had commanded. When he heard it, he felt at once that nothing would be so dangerous to him, as that the Mexicans should know that the white men were not all of one mind. They would take fresh courage to drive them all from the country, when they saw them fighting against one another. The news could not be kept secret from Montezuma, who now began to wonder whether this new leader

might not be the true messenger from the god, and Cortes only a pretender; but he believed Cortes when he told him with his usual calmness, that Narvaez was a rebel, and that he would soon show him how rebels ought to be punished.

He called Alvarado, his principal officer, into his presence, and told him that he must for a time intrust the care of the troops to him, while he, with the rest of his knights and seventy of his bravest men, marched to Cempoallo, where Narvaez was now stationed.

He lost no time in setting off, and was joined on the road by two other companies of Spaniards, who had been stationed by him in other parts of the country, and who now heard of his distress. When he drew near to Cempoalla, he had under him but five horse and two hundred and

sixty foot soldiers, to face a far larger force than his own army, if they could have been all with him.

The march had been so rapid, that when near Cempoalla, the soldiers were glad to throw themselves on the wet grass by a rapid stream, which was then swollen by heavy rains. Cortes allowed them to rest awhile. He knew that they needed strength and bravery for what they had to do; and when he told them that he was not afraid to trust to their courage, which he had never found to fail, they were eager to press forward, and show him that they would not disappoint him. After wading through the rapid stream, by which one poor fellow was swept away and drowned, there was but a wood to go through, and they would be close by the city. It was evening, and the heavy foli-

age of the tall trees shut out all but a glimmering light, just enough to show them an old way-mark of their own. There stood the rough wooden cross they had set up, as they passed through the wood before. Cortes fell on his knees before it. He felt that it was the chief desire of his heart to plant the cross, not as in this dark wood, hidden and disowned, but in the light of day, on the top of every temple throughout the land. He confessed his sins, as he knelt there; and all his soldiers, following his example, fell on their knees too and confessed their sins. None of them reckoned it a sin that they had deceived the confiding Emperor, by making him believe that they were more than men. All believed that they were doing God service with their swords; that it was right to persecute and destroy the

heathen. They thought themselves brave, but they were only brave enough to fight for their own faith; not to suffer shame and scorn for it.

Narvaez thought himself safe. He had taken possession of a pyramid. The buildings in its outer courts were filled with his soldiers, and he, with his friends, were in the sanctuary on the top. There he took his ease, waiting in expectation of a submissive answer from Cortes. It was not till his enemy was at the very entrance of the city, that one of the sentinels saw the army stealing quietly along. He gave the alarm, and it reached the General, but every one believed it to be a mistake. There could not have been time, they thought, for the march from Mexico. Cortes did not wish to shed the blood of his own countrymen. He wished to show

his strength ; to get possession of Narvaez, and then to make the fresh supply of soldiers sent against him from Cuba his own friends, that he might go back to Mexico with more power than before.

Sudden fear came over the army in Cempoalla. They were completely unprepared for an attack. The darkness of night added to their difficulties. It was lighted up only by a number of sparkling fire flies, which were abundant in that tropical climate, and these the soldiers mistook for the matchlocks of armed men, and thus thought their enemies more numerous than they really were.

Cortes seized on the artillery suddenly. Then one of his knights, at the head of some men, rushed, fully armed, up the stairs to the top of the pyramid, and wounded the general with his lance. Narvaez cried

out that he was dying, and his officers and soldiers, in great terror, threw down their arms, and (now their leader was taken) would not attempt to make any further resistance. Only twelve men had been killed. The sound of tumult and fighting died away, and all was quiet in the city until morning. Then Cortes threw round him his richest robes, and as he sat in royal state, commanded that Narvaez, and four or five of the chief leaders of the army, should be brought before him in chains. Narvaez, who felt that the conqueror might look on him as little better than a coward to have been overcome by so small a force, said, "You have to thank fortune for putting me in your power." Cortes, who was always ready with a proud speech, answered, that "he certainly had much to be thankful for, but that he looked on

his victory the night before as the least thing he had done, since he came into the country."

When the soldiers of Narvaez saw by day-light how few had come against them, they felt vexed, like their master, to be taken for cowards; but Cortes made them so many fair promises, if they would join his army, that when they listened to his kind words, and saw his royal bearing, they began to think they might be better off under him than under their old master, who had not the same power of winning hearts, and who had never been beloved by his soldiers.

But Cortes often found it a very troublesome business to manage his larger army. Sometimes his own soldiers were jealous, if he took notice of the new comers, and as these new allies had joined him for

what they could get, they were always ready to leave when there seemed no prospect of becoming rich.

Cortes thought it would be well to separate them, and send them on different duties, to different parts of the country. Just as he was preparing to part them, in the best way, he found that he should require them all in Mexico.

CHAPTER X.

WICKEDNESS OF ALVARADO—CORTES RETURNS IN HASTE TO MEXICO—THE MEXICANS ATTACK THE SPANISH QUARTERS—CORTES PREPARES TO LEAVE THE CITY BY NIGHT—BOTELLO, THE ASTROLOGER, EXPECTS A PROSPEROUS RETREAT.

While Alvarado was left in command of the troops, the time drew on for a great festival, which was held by the heathen during the month of May. It was a gay holiday time, and the chief nobles assembled in the court of the great temple, dressed magnificently, to dance and to make merry; while the poorer people were enjoying themselves in the same way elsewhere. Alvarado was a cruel man. He kept down his bad nature while under

the orders of his general, but now that he might do what he liked, he planned a wicked deed. He had been admitted into the temple-court, with some soldiers, to see the merry-making. As the Spaniards always wore their armour, nothing was thought of their being clad in steel on this occasion. In the midst of the dancing, Alvarado made a signal, and the Spaniards drew their swords, and fell on the 600 unarmed chiefs, who were soon all stretched dead upon the ground.

Alvarado might have thought that he was only doing what his general had done in Cholula, but the massacre of Cholula was a punishment for treachery. It was the only way that Cortes saw of saving his army from complete destruction. This was wanton cruelty. It was even said that Alvarado did the deed for the sake of getting the gold and

jewels with which the best dresses of the chiefs were so highly ornamented.

Cortes felt very angry to hear how his officer had behaved. He hastened back with his increased army. He had now in all 1,200 Spaniards under him, and 8,000 Tlascalans. He marched with all speed to Mexico. When he crossed the causeway, the scene was very different to what it had been on his first arrival. No curious Indians in their canoes came crowding over the lake; no flowers were thrown at the soldiers' feet. If the "white men" were still taken for gods, it was for such cruel gods as the Aztec people would do their best to drive away. The Spanish army reached their quarters in the city, and still all was silent, and the house-tops deserted. But as soon as they were shut within their stone walls, active Indian hands

were at work to lower all the drawbridges. The road to the market-place was thus cut off, and no provisions could be had, but such as were already within the building, and seven deep channels of water lay between the army and the causeway. It seemed that they were effectually blocked in. Cortes prepared to terrify the citizens by sallying out at the head of a party of his men. He had taken the Aztec race for cowards, because they had never yet resisted him; but he did not know them. They were as brave and fierce as the Tlascalans, and much more numerous.

Before leaving the court-yard he heard the rolling sound of multitudes approaching; and all at once the city streets, which had been so silent, were crowded with armed men. The house-tops, too, were covered with them. But of this great

multitude, only so many as the square could hold were able to attack the Spanish quarters. It was soon filled, and the Aztecs, in their cotton quilted armour, faced the terrible cannons of the Spaniards. The "thunder and lightning" they so much dreaded, roared and flashed among them, and they fell dead in great numbers. Still they did not fear; more rushed in to fill up the places of the dead. All they could do was to throw darts over the walls at the enemy, and these did but little injury. They rattled on his steel armour, and fell to the ground. Cortes saw the cruel havoc his cannon made among the people. It was no pleasure to him to shed their blood. He thought it might put a stop to the battle if Montezuma commanded them tc withdraw. Montezuma had obeyed every word of the Spaniard

since that dreadful day when the Aztec prince was burnt, and he himself put in irons. He, therefore, (as Cortes wished it,) put on his crown and royal robes, and stood on the flat roof of the palace in presence of his people. They were all quiet for a time when they saw him, and many fell on their faces, just as they had been accustomed to do in old times, when they had the great favour (as they then thought it) of looking on the face of their Emperor. They listened while he told them that the white men were his friends, and while he entreated them to lay down their arms, and be at peace. But then they thought, "What friends are these? Does the Emperor call these men his friends who would kill 600 of our nobles in one day, and that not in battle, but when they professed to be at peace?" And one

among the crowd cried out, "Base Aztec, woman, coward! the white men have made you a woman, fit only to weave and spin!"

One of these wounded him on the head, and he was obliged to leave the house-top in grief and humiliation, to think that he was cast off by his subjects. He was no longer a prince. He had given up his own country and people for strangers, and did not deserve that they should treat him as their sovereign. He would not suffer any care to be taken of his wounds, and soon after died. Cortes had him buried in royal pomp, as if he had been still an Emperor.

The streets were quiet for a time, after the Emperor had been wounded, and the chiefs consulted together on what should be done. As they found they could do but little mischief to their enemy from the

square, they ordered men to the top of the pyramid, that they might hurl down stones and darts from it on the heads of the Spaniards. This was a much more effectual mode of attack. The stones fell with great force from such a height. Cortes first sent an officer with some men to take the pyramid, but they were beaten back. He then headed his men himself, and led them up the winding stairs.

On the broad flat top a terrible struggle with the Aztecs took place, but Cortes soon overthrew them; and tearing the war-god from its shrine, dashed it over the sides of the pyramid. He thought that if once their gods were cast down, the people would give up all in fear. But this insult only made them more fierce.

Cortes was quite determined to conquer

the city of Mexico, but he did not like to be shut into it as he now was. He would rather attack it from without. The great difficulty in escaping would be to cross the channels, now that the drawbridges were removed. He set some of his people to work to make a bridge, which the army might carry with them, and place over each of the channels, one after another.

He also ordered that a curious machine, called a *manta*, should be made. It was a tower on rollers, with two divisions, which were filled with cannon. The sides were pierced with holes, and through these the mouths of the cannon were pointed, ready to be discharged as it rolled through the streets. Cortes thought it necessary to carry away with him a large part of the numerous gifts which he had

received from the treasure-house of Montezuma. It was not for himself that he wished it, but for his sovereign. He thought it best to be as little encumbered as possible with things for his own use, and he begged his officers not to load themselves too heavily. He saw the soldiers look greedily at the heaps of gold, and precious stones, and curious garments, which lay before them; and remembering how they were always willing to serve him through hardship and poverty, he did not like to command them to leave behind what they set their hearts so much on. "Take what you will of it," said he; "better you should have it than these Mexican hounds. But be careful not to overload yourselves: he travels safest in the dark night, who travels lightest."

An astrologer in the Spanish camp,

named Botello, advised that the army should retreat by night. He had seen it written in the stars (he said) that that would be the safest time. Cortes thought the night-time best, because it was very unusual for any of the Indian tribes to fight by night.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPANISH ARMY RETREATS FROM MEXICO—THE "MELANCHOLY NIGHT"—BATTLE OF OTUMBA—THE SPANIARDS VICTORIOUS, ARE WELCOMED IN TLASCALA—CORTES RECEIVES A REINFORCEMENT FROM CUBA, INTENDED FOR NARVAEZ—GUATEMOZIN, SUCCESSOR OF MONTEZUMA—PREPARATIONS MADE BY CORTES FOR THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO—MARCH TO MEXICO.

Armed men on horseback, with many thousand foot soldiers, could not travel without noise. They stole along as softly as possible, but the rolling of the artillery and baggage-waggons sounded unusual in the night-time.

It soon became generally known, that the Spanish army were attempting to escape. The great drum of serpents'

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skins, kept at the top of the pyramid, and never beat but in times of terrible alarm, now sounded, and the Mexican troops were not long in rousing themselves up. By the time the army had reached the causeway, the whole lake was covered with canoes, all filled with Indians, armed in their fashion with darts and spears. They were all well agreed not to let the enemy escape.

Cortes ordered that the bridge should be quickly laid across a wide and deep gap in the causeway, and the army began to hurry over it. As they crowded on, they were furiously attacked on all sides; the Aztecs scrambling to the brink of the causeway, dragging some of the soldiers down into the lake, and wounding others with their weapons. It was long before all the Spaniards and Tlascalans had crossed

the bridge, and those already on the causeway must wait until every man was over, before they could lay the bridge over the last channel, and fly into the open country beyond.

Cortes had not expected this furious attack, or he would have provided a second bridge, before venturing to leave his quarters. At length the last man was over, and the soldiers put forth all their strength to lift the bridge, but it would not stir. The weight of the heavy baggage-waggons and artillery, and the tramp of the men passing over, had completely jammed it down. It could not be moved.

The troops crowded together in the darkness, and the enraged Mexicans fought furiously, believing they had the enemy in their power. It was useless to waste more time in striving to move the

bridge. Every one thought only how he should save his own life. The heavy baggage-waggons, with all the rich treasure saved for the Emperor of Spain, were dragged forward and thrown into the next channel, but they did not fill it up. Many who cast themselves into the water, to swim across, were killed before they could reach the other side.

The wide channel was soon nearly filled with the bodies of the slain, and with the spoil they had brought with them from the city. What were gold and jewels, and feather mantles, to men about to perish! The knights on horseback could now partly swim and partly wade over. As it grew lighter, Cortes could see most of his officers around him. There were Sandoval, Olid, Orday, and Avila. Velasquez de Leon had been killed, and Alvarado

was still fighting. It was he who had cruelly murdered the 600 Aztec nobles, and now there was hope of revenge. How gladly would the Indians drag this "child of the sun," as they had once called him, to sacrifice at the top of the temple! They had already killed his horse under him, as he rode near the brink of the last channel. By the help of their horses, the other heavily-armed knights had crossed, and he had none. But he still had his long lance. He stretched it forth, and planted it as far from him as he could into the chasm, and then exerting all his strength, which was very great, he swung himself across to the other side. The chronicler who tells of this says, "It was a leap which would have been thought impossible to man." The place was always afterwards called "Alvarado's leap."

The night of this miserable retreat of the Spaniards from Mexico was well named the "Melancholy Night." Even the spirit of Cortes, which had never before failed, sunk within him when he looked round and saw how small a number of all his faithful followers had escaped, and thought of the multitude sunk in the lake, or lying dead on the causeway. Among the dead was Botello, the astrologer, who had seen it written in the stars that it would be well to fly by night.

The Indian girl Marina was safe. She had been guarded by a strong body of Tlascalans. The Spaniards could not now expect that the native Indians in the villages would give them food. They dragged with them a few of the poor dead horses; and as they marched on the way back

again to Tlascala, they fed on these and on such wild fruits as grew in the woods. No people can bear hunger better than the Spaniards. They little thought, tired and beaten as they were, that more fighting was at hand, until, coming to the top of a hill that overlooked the wide plain of Otumba, they saw before them a large army of Aztecs. It was well known among the Indian chiefs how many Spaniards had fallen on the "melancholy night;" and they thought that, by bringing these fresh multitudes against the few that were left, they might easily sweep them away. But those few were brave and strong, and well armed, and had a leader who knew how to employ their strength to the best advantage.

It suddenly struck Cortes, that if he could but put the chief of all this host

to death, the crowd would fly in terror. He knew him at a distance by his splendid dress. He was carried on a litter by his younger chiefs, and had only come to look upon the battle. Cortes felt that what he had to do must be done suddenly. He called to his knights to follow him, and all (ready in an instant to obey the word of command) dashed through the thick crowds, trampling them down and killing them at every step. Cortes sprung upon the chief and struck him to the ground, and young Juan de Salamanca, a favourite page, put him to death. It happened as Cortes had said: the whole multitude in terror turned and fled away. The Spaniards followed and beat them down, and then hastened on in triumph to Tlascala. They did not know how they should be received there, now that their

numbers were so much fewer, and there would not be the same dread of them as before. They were rejoiced to find the whole tribe as friendly as ever.

There was but one among the chiefs who would have wished to give them up. This was the young Prince Xicotencatl. He thought it a disgrace to give up the freedom of Tlascala to strangers. His reasons seemed good ones. "The Spaniards," he said, "talk to us of their God; cannot we see that gold is their god? They have profaned our temples: let us take our revenge." He was not attended to by the older chiefs; but they could never persuade him to their way of thinking.

After their miserable sufferings in retreating from Mexico, the Spanish soldiers were very unwilling to remain any longer

in the country. They wished to return as quickly as possible to Cuba. The soldiers of Narvaez, in particular, were tired of a campaign, in which they lost all their riches as soon as they had gained them.

But Cortes, as usual, by his eloquent words, persuaded most of them to remain with him to the end. He only begged that none would stay who were afraid of danger, for such he should not feel could be of any use to him.

After this only a few left, and he gave orders that they should be courteously conducted to the coast by Alvarado. Cortes saw that idleness was never good for his men. He knew that it would put them in spirits to plunder the neighbouring tribes, and gain easy victories over them. He therefore sent them against the people who dwelt round about Tlas-

cala. By this means he gradually increased the number of natives who would serve him in future battles. His mind was still actively employed in forming his plans for the conquest of Mexico. He did not intend to return to the Valley until he could make sure of victory. Nothing could be done with any effect against the island city, without a fleet of vessels of the size of those which had been burnt. He therefore ordered his clever ship-builder, Martin Lopez, to prepare materials for thirteen vessels. Timber was to be had in all the woods round Vera Cruz, where they were to be made ready. And when the separate parts were constructed, a number of willing native Indians would carry them on their shoulders over the hills and plains, to the Valley of Mexico.

While Cortes was waiting at Tlascala, he heard of unexpected help, more useful to him than crowds of the conquered Indians. This was from the arrival of 150 men, and 20 horse, from Cuba. Velasquez, when he despatched them for the use of his friend Narvaez, little thought they would be of the greatest service to his old enemy Cortes. Other assistance he had about the same time unexpectedly, from the landing of a cargo of arms and military stores on the coast. They had been sent from the Canary Islands for sale, and Cortes readily bought them all. One of his employments at Tlascala, was to make the Tlascalans better soldiers; for this purpose, he had them regularly drilled and instructed. The Mexicans felt secure for some time after the Spaniards had left their city; knowing how

much their number had been lessened on the "melancholy night." They thought it unlikely that their enemy would dare to show his face in the Valley again.

They chose another Emperor, who soon after died, and the young man who succeeded him was of a very different character from Montezuma. His name was Guatemozin. He was but twenty-five years of age, very brave, and fully resolved that the Spaniards, if they did come again, should never govern him as they had ruled Montezuma.

He continued in the same mind when he heard all that was going on in Tlascala. When he was told that the Spaniards were becoming stronger every day, that all the neighbouring tribes were yielding to them, and that at no very distant day they would come to the Valley, and once more

try to make it subject to Spain; Guatemozin did all he could to stir up his subjects to bravery, and he begged all who feared would leave the city.

The vessels which Martin Lopez was preparing at Vera Cruz, were not quite ready; but the army was in so good a state of discipline, that Cortes fixed a day for leaving Tlascala, and marching to the Valley. He had other things to do there before attacking Mexico. He set out with 600 foot soldiers, and 40 horse, and the Tlascalan tribes who followed, were in better order than they had ever been in before. Cortes had been in the habit of writing accounts of his proceedings to the Emperor Charles V. His letters have been preserved. In one despatched at this time, he says, "We had no choice, but victory or death; and, our minds

once resolved, we moved forward with as light a step as if we had been going on an errand of pleasure."

It must have been a very thoughtless heart that could look on war as a pleasure; for war is one of the greatest punishments on a wicked world; and it is said to be one of the great blessings of the kingdom of Christ, that "men will not learn war any more;" "nothing shall hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," saith the Lord.

Guatemozin, the brave young Emperor, was fully followed by all his subjects in the city of Mexico; but the Prince of Tezcuco, the city next in importance in the Valley, had resolved to befriend the white men; and Cortes having had kind messages from him, took the shortest road to Tezcuco, and there he found the people ready to welcome him, and a

palace cleared and prepared for his troops, just as it had been before in Mexico. Still he was always on his guard, lest there should be deceit under this show of friendship. He need not have feared; the Prince was always true to him.

Cortes had ordered that the thirteen vessels (brigantines, they were called) should be brought to Tezcuco when they were finished. Tezcuco stood just half a league from the lake, and he intended to have a wide and deep channel dug from the city to the water side, that the vessels might be launched in safety, and might float down the stream, one after another, into the lake.

The Prince allowed him to set as many Indians to the work as he needed. He employed 8,000 constantly for two months in digging the channel, which was

twelve feet deep, and twelve wide, and well defended at the sides with stone work. In one part it had to be cut through hard rock, and this was a tedious business.

Cortes kept himself and his troops in activity, all the while these preparations were making, by marching to different parts of the Valley, and conquering its principal cities. None of them had at all the strength or means of defence of the city of Mexico; and he thought that by conquering them first, he might so terrify the Mexicans, that they would submit to him at once, when he came against them. He would most likely have judged rightly, if there had been any one less determined than Guatemozin at the head of the empire.

This "pleasant errand" of war, carried terror, and misery, and death, all round

the lovely Valley. The Spaniards regained the fame they had lost on the "melancholy night." They were once more thought unconquerable.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BRIGANTINES FINISHED—BLOCKADE OF MEXICO —ASSAULTS MADE ON THE CITY—SACRIFICE ON THE TEMPLE—PROPHECY OF THE HEATHEN PRIESTS—ITS FAILURE—VICTORY OF THE SPANIARDS—WEAKNESS OF CORTES.

Martin Lopez finished his work at Vera Cruz, and the planks, sails, cordage, anchors, and other iron-work, were all ready. The Indian carriers assembled, each man to take his burden of 50lbs. weight; and the long train set out, with native troops to guard them, and Lopez at their head to direct all. "It was a marvellous thing," says Cortes in one of his letters to the Emperor, "this transportation of thirteen vessels of war on the shoul-

ders of men, for nearly twenty leagues, across the mountains."

All at Tezcuco had long been impatient for their arrival. On their entrance into the city, they were received with gay military music; and it was not long before they were put together and floated gently down the channel into the lake.

Such a sight as this, no native of the Valley had ever seen before. Crowds were there to look on—to see the ensign of Castile floating over the foremost vessel—to hear the shouts, "Castile and Tlascala!—long live our Sovereign the Emperor!" and then a general burst of praise to God from the Spaniards.

One of the vessels was damaged and would not sail, but the others were all in the best order; and these twelve formidable "water-houses," with smoke and

flame and deadly shots issuing from their sides, soon gained what Cortes called a "beautiful victory" over the Indian flotilla; for the Aztecs were brave enough to bring out their light canoes, and to try the strength of their numbers on the lake. It was an easy matter to overthrow them, and multitudes of Aztecs were drowned in the waters. Only those escaped who could glide away up the canals which intersected the streets of Mexico; for there the larger vessels could not follow them.

Cortes took possession of the strong fort of Xoloc, and established part of his army along the great causeway. He set Alvarado at another entrance to the city, and other officers at every part where there was any possibility of escape. The brigantines guarded the lake, and thus Mexico was completely blockaded.

Cortes much hoped that Guatemozin would now (seeing his great strength) give up to him. He sent messengers to entreat him not to bring all the misery on his subjects which must follow if he held out. But neither the young Emperor nor his followers once thought of submitting.

Then Cortes commanded an assault. His division of the army forced their way up the broad street, from the causeway to the square. They attacked the pyramid, and hurled the war-god from its top; but first (for they never forgot their love of gold, however eagerly fighting) they tore off the idol's golden mask and rich jewels, and took them as booty.

These soldiers of the Cross, as they loved to be called, were doing the very thing forbidden to the Jews of old, when they carried on war against the heathen.

God said, "Thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, (the graven images,) nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein; for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God."

The Aztecs fought fiercely, and the Spaniards retreated towards evening behind their fort.

Cortes, in his next attack, ordered that combustibles should be thrown into some of the principal buildings. In this way the palace of Montezuma was soon destroyed, all its gardens desolated, and the eagles and other birds regained their liberty, and flew away to the mountains.

Still there was no sign of submission, and Alvarado now wished to head an assault on his side of the city. His road lay direct to the market place. Cortes thought him rash, but did not oppose his

wish. He only warned his followers, when he saw their eagerness, to be sure to fill up the channels as they went, to secure a retreat. They heeded little what was said, in their hurry to rush forward, and it was not until they were far into the city, and saw crowds of the enemy mustering round them on all sides, that they remembered, too late, how completely they were shut in.

Cortes soon became aware of the danger they were in from disobeying him. He lost not a moment in spurring forward to help them; but it was no easy matter to cross the channel with enemies all round.

After a deadly struggle, eighty-two Spaniards were taken captive. Cortes himself but just escaped. He would have lost his life, but that the Aztecs could

not decide to kill him, while they had any hope of taking him prisoner.

It was a dismal thing for those who lived to return wounded, and with battered armour to their quarters, knowing that eighty-two of their fellow-soldiers and friends would be led to a cruel death on the Temple; and to watch from the camp, in the stillness of evening, the procession of priests winding up the sides of the pyramid, and revenging themselves on their enemies.

It put the Aztecs in spirits to have been so far victorious. They now gave forth a solemn prophecy from the heathen priests, who declared that in eight days the Spaniards would abandon the siege and be driven away. All the allies from the neighbouring cities in the Valley began to fear what would become of them if

Guatemozin were really victorious in the end. They slunk away afraid, and even the Tlascalans were about to leave through fear. Cortes only begged of his old friends that they would not go far till the eight days had passed; and then they might judge for themselves whether the priests were worthy of belief or not.

Cortes thought it well to give his army rest during these eight days, much hoping that when they were past, the Emperor would surrender.

The time slipped away, and the Tlascalans and other allies returned to the camp, more ready to trust the "white men" than ever, now that the priests were proved to be false. Cortes received them kindly, but gave them no hopes of such forbearance on any future desertion. They could not but remember that he had

hanged Prince Xicotencatl in Tezcuco, just before the siege, because *he* had deserted, and was on his road back to Tlascala.

Guatemozin would not submit. Cortes therefore determined to gain the city in as short a time as possible. He directed that the army should attack it, and as they went forward, should overthrow every building, and make use of the materials in filling up all the channels.

The native Indian allies were set to this work, and as the Aztecs saw them so employed, they said in a taunting tone, "Go on, the more you destroy, the more you will have to build again hereafter. If we conquer, you shall build for us; and if your white friends conquer, they will make you do as much for them."

These words soon came true. The

Aztecs were gradually driven into the very heart of their city—crowded together in a space too narrow for them. Nearly all their food was gone—they were stricken with famine and disease—the dead lay unburied in the streets. How all was changed in Mexico since the day that Montezuma had proudly shown to the "children of the sun," the beauties and riches of his palace and capital! The perishing people still fought with a courage and ferocity which surprised the Spaniards, till (on the 15th of August, 1521) the city was taken by a general assault.

Guatemozin, who tried to make his escape in a canoe, was seized by the captain of one of the brigantines. The city was opened, and the poor wretched remains of its inhabitants were allowed to depart, ragged, forlorn, and starving;

while the Spaniards celebrated their triumph with feasting, and afterwards with thanksgiving to God.

When Guatemozin was brought before his conqueror, he laid his hand upon the general's poniard, and said, "Better despatch me with this, and rid me of life at once."

"Fear not," answered Cortes, "you shall be treated with all honour—you have defended your capital like a brave warrior. A Spaniard knows how to respect valour, even in an enemy."

Yet, afterwards, Cortes behaved weakly and meanly to the brave young man. He listened to some of his officers who believed that Guatemozin had concealed a great part of his treasure, and gave his consent, when they demanded that he and his favourite chief should be put to the

torture, and compelled to discover it to them.

As they were stretched on the rack, side by side, the chief cried out through pain; but Guatemozin bore his sufferings without a groan, and gently reproved him by saying, "Am I then taking my ease in the bath?"

No doubt, after this Cortes must have felt inwardly ashamed whenever he looked on one, to whom he had boasted of his honour, and yet so shamefully deceived. He might have feared some secret revenge; for, after allowing Guatemozin to live some time, thinking that he was engaged in a conspiracy against him, he had him hanged on a tree, in one of his expeditions to another part of the country.

CONCLUSION.

REBUILDING OF MEXICO—ITS CATHEDRAL AND CHURCHES — PRIESTS — PRESENT CONDITION OF MEXICO—CORTES MEETS WITH INGRATITUDE IN SPAIN—SETS OUT ON OTHER ADVENTURES—DIES.

CORTES had now done what it was in his mind to do, when he first heard of the greatness and power of the empire of Mexico. He *had* won that city and valley for the crown of Spain. It was true that the city, in its ruined and burnt condition, was not a fit capital for such an empire; but there were crowds of Indians who might be made to labour in rebuilding it. There were sufficient stone quarries in the neighbourhood to supply materials. The Spanish general would not leave his work

half-finished. He would raise a city more worthy of Spain than the old one had been. It should have no more idol temples. The broken idols should be built into the foundation of a temple of God.

A magnificent cathedral was soon raised on the ruins of the largest pyramid, and numerous churches were erected throughout the city. Then Cortes sent to Spain for priests, and the twelve who were first settled in the Valley, were well instructed and laborious servants of Christ, "who counted not their lives dear unto them, for His sake;" men like the good priest Aguilar, who did not look for the reward of their labours in this world; who were content with poor clothing, and plain food, and whose hearts were set on winning souls to Christ. They established schools and

colleges, and had great success among the people. But in process of time, worldly-minded priests also came over from Spain. They set the bad example of seeking eagerly for earthly treasures—they brought with them the corruptions of the Romish Church; and now that 300 years have passed by, travellers tell of the luxury and self-indulgence of the great; and the ignorance and superstition of the poor in the city and valley of Mexico, for the people have not yet learned to do the will of Him whose cross they have set up by the way-sides, and in the churches throughout the land.

Cortes met with but little gratitude for all that he had done. For a time, indeed, he was spoken of as a great conqueror, and on one of his visits to Spain, he was welcomed with much pomp and ceremony;

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but he had enemies in his own country, who were jealous of him, because *he*, setting out a poor adventurer, had done so much. They spread falsehoods at court about him in his absence, so that at last he lost the favour of Charles V., and was soon forgotten. The Emperor appointed another man as governor over the city and valley, and gave the conqueror only the military command, and a large tract of land called the valley of Oaxaca, with the title of Marquis of that valley.

Cortes still felt as unwilling to settle down in quiet, as he had done in his boyhood. After he had worked for some time in improving and cultivating the land, and had provided for the worship of God, and the instruction of the people, he set out on further adventures; and

many perils he went through in seeking to discover more land.

He died at length in Spain, at the age of sixty-three, on the 16th of December, 1547; and was buried, according to his own wish, in the land which he had discovered and subdued.

THE END.

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